ELECTRONIC SOUND

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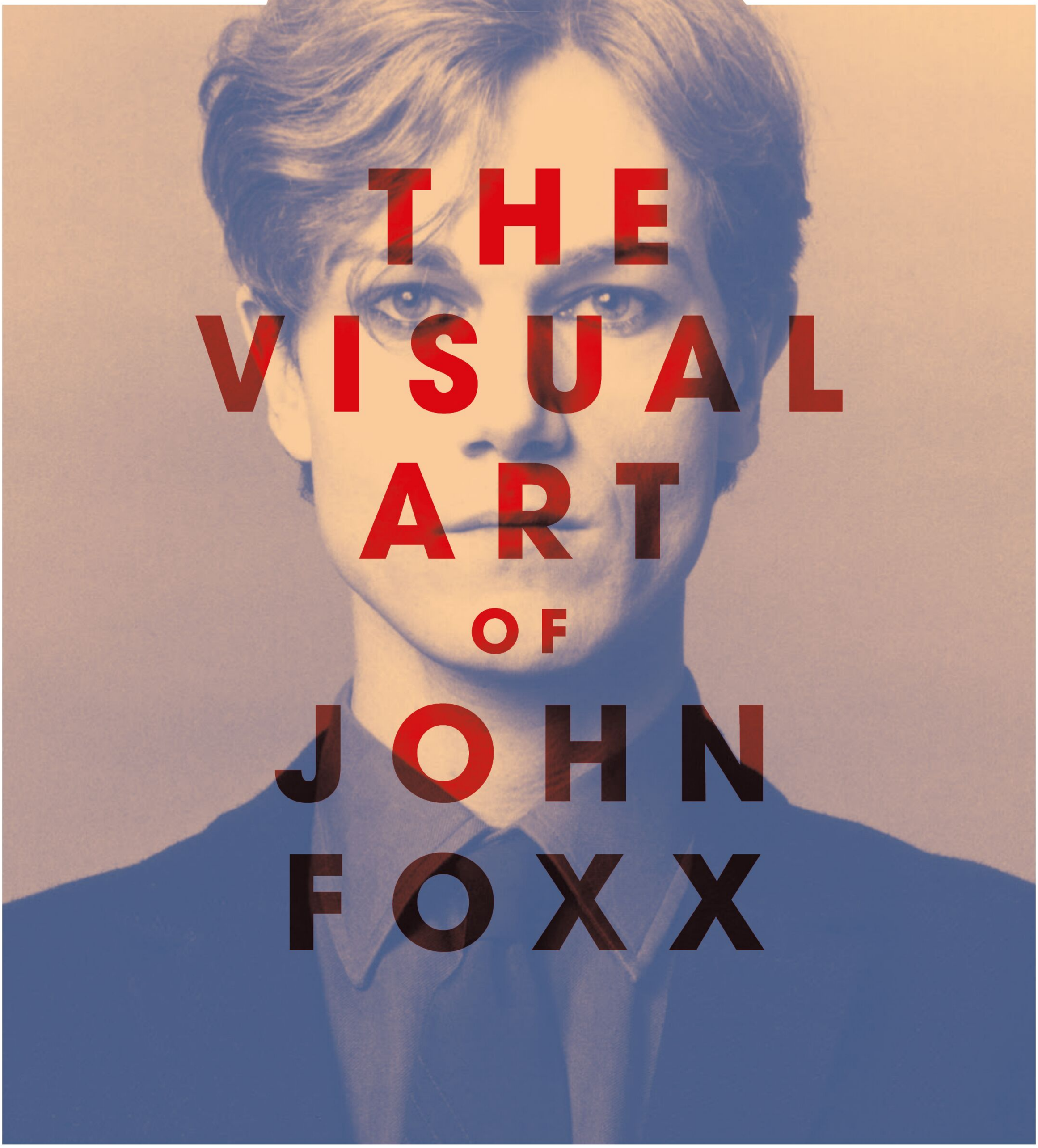
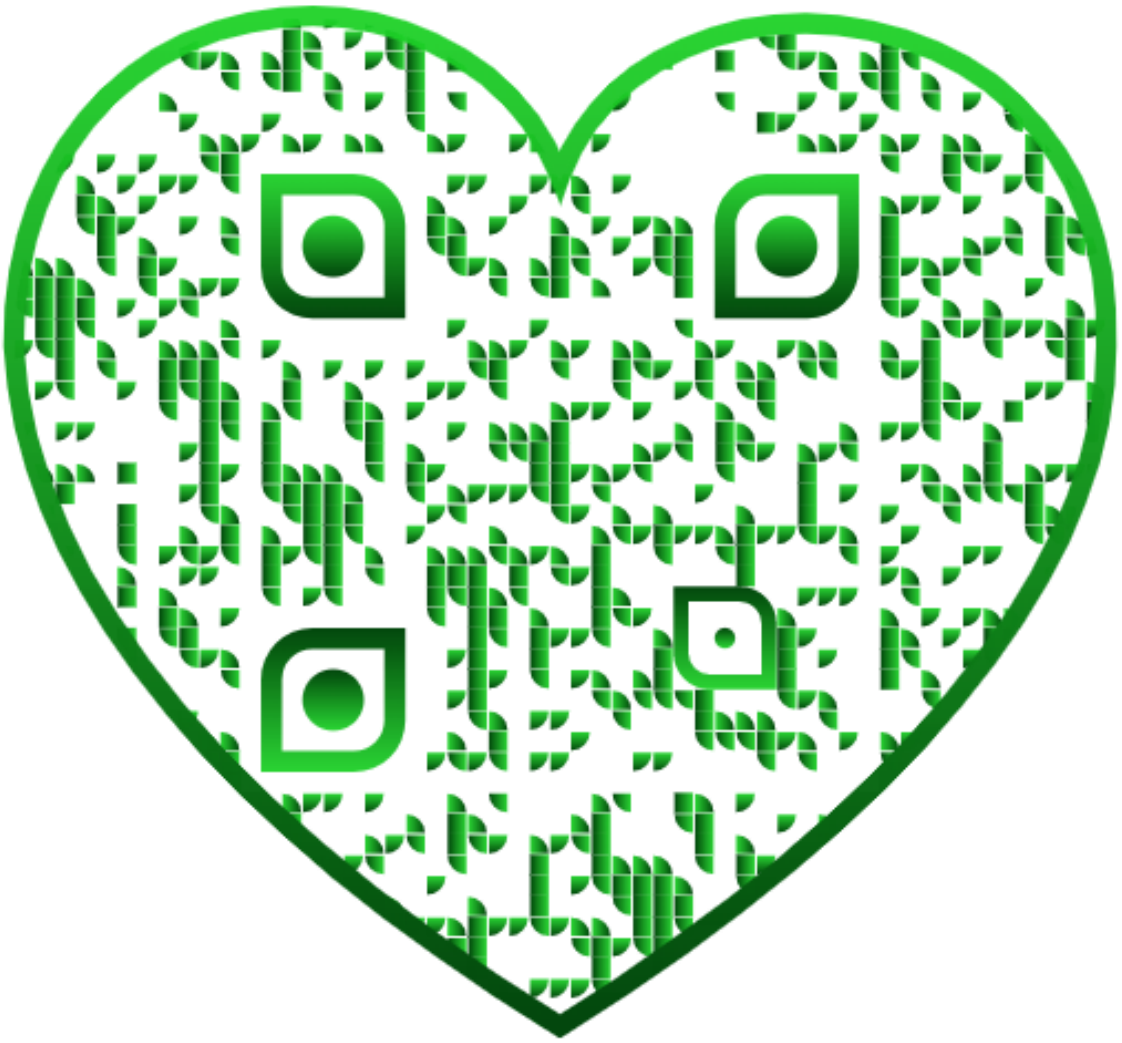


THE VISUAL ART OF JOHN FOXX

JEFF MILLS / JOHN GRANT / WOLFGANG TILLMANS / KEELEY FORSYTH / ORBITAL / SUZANNE CIANI

STATE OF THE ART



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WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

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When we heard that John Foxx's major project for this year was going to be a book of his artwork, we immediately started making plans to feature it in Electronic Sound in a big way. 'Electricity And Ghosts' is an opportunity for us to create a radically different ES cover story, one that focuses on visual art rather than on audio recordings, although it still makes sense in the wider context of electronic music. After all, this is a genre that often embraces sound, design, art and technology in various ways, and it's intriguing when the elements merge to produce some unique and special work. You might even describe it as a sort of synthesis.

And if there's someone in the electronic firmament who comprehensively represents the coming together of music and art to forge a new whole, then it's John Foxx. He's the embodiment of the golden era of the British art school, a man who was taught to look closely at the world around him and interpret what he saw and felt through imagery, but who also decided to explore the idea of a rock band as an art project.

Foxx was born Dennis Leigh into a working-class family in Chorley, a Lancashire town around 20 miles north-west of Manchester. His Wikipedia entry describes his father as "a coal miner and pugilist", while his mother was a mill worker. A young teenager when The Beatles released their first LP, he began his art training at Harris School of Art in Preston (now the University of Central Lancashire), before taking up a place at the Royal College of Art in London in 1973. It was at the RCA that he hatched the idea of "designing" a band, one that subsequently became Ultravox!, complete with that curious exclamation mark at the end of their name. To be the face of this artifice, Dennis Leigh needed a new persona, so he also "designed" John Foxx.

"Foxx is much more intelligent than I am, better looking, better lit… a kind of naively perfected entity," he once said. "He's just like a recording, where you can make several performances until you get it right, or make a composite of several successful sections and then discard the rest."

We've invited Foxx to tell us about some of his favourite images from 'Electricity And Ghosts' for our cover feature. You can see the process of him designing himself, together with environments for him to occupy, in much the same way Ultravox! was a sonic space for his ideas. The result is a fascinating glimpse into his artistic approach, techniques and aesthetic principles, as well as his interests, obsessions, hopes and fears. It's very much the synthesis of John Foxx.

We have a wealth of entertaining reads elsewhere in the magazine too. This month's other highlights include Jeff Mills, John Grant, Suzanne Ciani, Orbital, Keeley Forsyth, Wolfgang Tillmans and Radio 6 Music DJ Tom Ravenscroft. We also have a new regular item in The Back called The Best Of…, which we think you're going to really enjoy. Our first volunteer is µ-Ziq man and Planet Mu boss Mike Paradinas, who talks about peaches, thigh-high socks and geek pies. As you do.

Electronically yours,
Mark and Velimir

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VINI REILLY AT HOME

Didsbury, Manchester

1982

PICTURE: MARK WARNER
INTERVIEW: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

"Mark Warner must have taken this portrait towards the end of 1982, because there's a copy of the 'Deux Triangles' EP on the mantelpiece – presumably fresh off the boat from Factory Benelux in Brussels," says James Nice, author of a new book called 'The Durutti Column: A Life Of Reilly'.

"Mark was a Manchester photographer who was very close to Vini. He shot him on numerous occasions, including for album covers. A lot of the 80 photos in the book are by Mark – in fact, it's dedicated to him. Unfortunately he passed away in 2001. Yet another 'Missing Boy' in the Factory story.

"Vini is pictured sitting in the attic room of drummer Bruce Mitchell's family house, who Vini had moved in with after they started playing together. They had a big house in Didsbury around the corner from the Factory office on Palatine Road. Previously they'd had drama students as lodgers, including Jilted John and the guy who went on to play Terry Duckworth in 'Coronation Street'.

"At the time, Vini was recording 'Another Setting', his third album. On his left is a Gibson Les Paul, his go-to guitar then, and on his right is a pretty well-used TEAC A-3340 which he bought second-hand from Bill Nelson after they played a couple of gigs together.

"The TEAC was transformative for Vini. It meant he could record spontaneously whenever he liked, and at least half of his second album 'LC' was written and recorded on it in a single night in March 1981. An astonishing creative burst. A lot more time and money was spent on 'Another Setting' at Strawberry, which was 10cc's studio, yet it's nothing like as good.

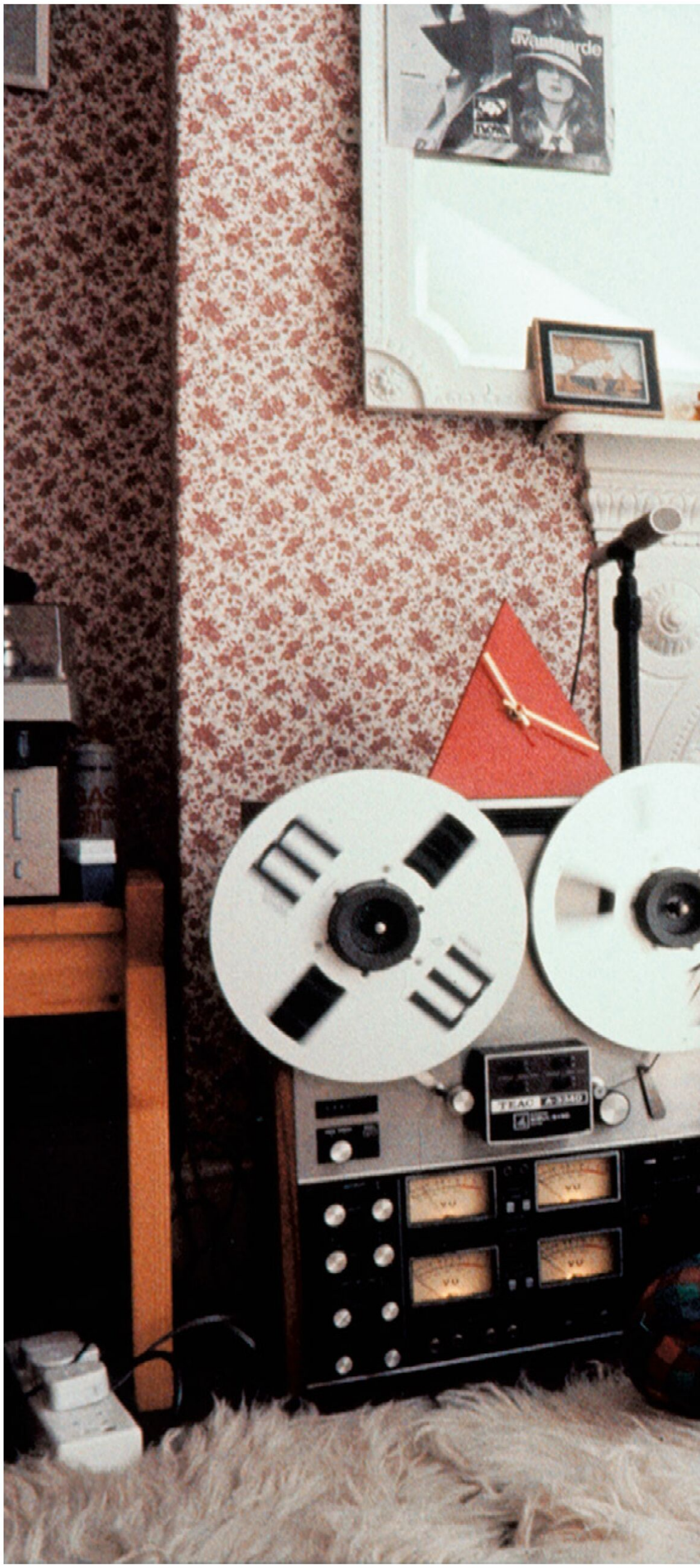
"Vini's story wasn't easy to piece together for the book, just as his music isn't that easy to write about. Vini and Bruce were both very generous with their time, but it takes a while for any biographer to gain the confidence of certain key interviewees – a couple of years in the case of Katherine Pearce, Vini's girlfriend between 1975 and 1980.

"There's a lot of detail about his childhood and his struggle to find an outlet for his talent during the 1970s. The pre-Factory period is an interesting part, including his unorthodox classical training and his brief flirtation with punk in The Nosebleeds. Who knew Vini opened for Sham 69 at The Roxy?

"Still, the single most fascinating discovery for me was finding out that throughout the Factory years, Vini was treated by a renowned psychiatrist named Sydney Gottlieb. Gottlieb was the shrink-in-residence at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club, and his celebrity client list included Peter Cook and Spike Milligan.

"That Tony Wilson quietly funded Vini's support for all those years – and never collected any commission as band manager – serves to confirm what a class act he was. And Bruce, who was manager, mentor and even a father figure, is every bit as remarkable as Vini and Tony. The book is a very human story about the three of them."

'The Durutti Column: A Life Of Reilly' is out now, published by Burning Shed



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John Foxx
‘Miles Away’ / ‘Sunset Rising’
White vinyl seven-inch

John Foxx talks through the two tracks on our latest seven-inch – one an electropop classic from 1980, the other an ambient gem from 1997

‘MILES AWAY’

The lead track on this month’s Electronic Sound seven-inch is John Foxx’s soaring synth masterpiece ‘Miles Away’, a song originally released as a single in 1980.

“I wrote ‘Miles Away’ around the same time as ‘The Garden’, my second solo album,” he says. “It reclaimed some of the territory that I’d instigated with Ultravox’s ‘Systems Of Romance’, but it was also another fresh start after ‘Metamatic’, sloughing off the recent past. The title was triggered by a girlfriend commenting on my usual state of mind.

“All the main parts here are an Arp Odyssey, a wee ripper of a synth. The drum sounds were initially a Roland CR-78, but I decided to try using an actual drummer, which was a real departure for me. This was Paul Edward, aka Ed Case, from the punk band 999. He was fast, efficient and powerful. I loved the energy he gave to the track.

“We recorded ‘Miles Away’ with Gareth Jones at Pathway, the eight-track studio where I did ‘Metamatic’. I think this was probably the last recording that Gareth and I did at Pathway before we started The Garden, our 24-track studio in Shoreditch, over in east London. It was here we created the album of that name.

“The lyrics of the song are concerned with change. Lines like, ‘There’s a new man at the edge of me / Making new plans for the rest of me’, were about altering myself to fit with different circumstances, and the image of an abandoned suit in an armchair on the cover of the original single illustrated the situation perfectly.

“I’ve always liked the idea of looking back and seeing a suit someone was wearing is suddenly empty, or the thought of someone just vanishing mid-sentence. I set the suit up in my living room and my friend Herbie Yamaguchi photographed it. I wanted it to look like a still from a long-lost movie and it was dead right.”

‘SUNSET RISING’

Flip the seven-inch over for ‘Sunset Rising’, a haunting piece from the first of John Foxx’s three ‘Cathedral Oceans’ albums, which came out in 1997.

“I like to play with titles,” he says. “If I’d just called this track ‘Sunset’, well, that’s a nice image, but if you put something alongside it that’s an opposite, like ‘Rising’, it becomes much more intriguing. It holds two opposing ideas at the same time.

“The instrumental part of ‘Sunset Rising’ was composed by the engineer and producer Peter Griffiths. Peter mostly worked on the Siouxsie And The Banshees albums recorded at The Garden, but he was a talented composer in his own right too. We were both interested in Samuel Barber’s work and he came up with this piece, which I thought sounded beautiful, so I suggested doing a vocal part. I could just hear it in there.

“A major factor in my music at this point was the use of 30-second delays. I had a Yamaha DX7 and I found some slow-developing pad sounds. I’d also had the DX modified by an ingenious surgeon from Paris, whose hobby was creating harmonic controls and long MIDI delays for it. I’d play over whatever came back from the delay and harmonise with it. It was an incredibly fruitful way of making music.

“The ‘Cathedral Oceans’ albums were inspired by the experiences I’d had singing with the school choir many years earlier. We often visited churches to perform and I became intrigued by the way sound behaved inside large buildings. In some, our choral pieces worked well. In others, they didn’t work at all. I later realised that the architecture was contributing to the sound. We were often harmonising with our delayed voices returning from the walls.

“When I got a Lexicon digital reverb unit for the studio, I thought, ‘Wow, this is it, we can have a cathedral in a suitcase now’. Gareth and I began to feed long tape delays and loops into it. You could sing into it. You could make choral pieces. And everything bloomed magnificently.”

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FIX UP, LOOK SHARP

Danish heritage speakers get a makeover

Ole Klifoth founded his company Audiovector in 1979, motivated by “a desire to make the perfect loudspeaker for the global high-end market”. After nearly half a century in production, that goal has been well and truly achieved, so he’s returning to the speaker that started it all off – the Trapeze – now updated as the Trapeze Reimagined. Imitating the original model’s angular, three-way floor standing design, they’ve used a proprietary 12-inch high-power mid/bass driver, with supposedly “the only AMT-tweeter on the market that stays true to the original design, from audio genius Dr Oskar Heil”. The £15,500 price tag might make you wince, but this is the company’s trophy piece, blending vintage and modern design. **audiovector.com**

PULSE

PERDURABO

Epic and emotive synth workouts

WHO?

Perdurabo is the alias of Davide Arneodo, an Italian multi-instrumentalist who divides his time between Turin and Berlin. After undergoing classical training (to this day he still identifies primarily as a violinist), in 2007 he joined the legendary Italian alt-rock ensemble Marlene Kuntz, playing both guitar and Moog synths.

WHY PERDURABO?

Outside of Marlene Kuntz, Arneodo was composing scores for theatre productions and collaborating with other like-minded artists. With encouragement from his friend and Apparat drummer Jörg Wähner, he upped sticks from Italy and moved to Berlin's storied Kreuzberg district 10 years ago. He immediately began work on his debut album 'Magnetar', finally releasing it at the start of this year. Though primarily a solo endeavour, it features a series of collaborations with vocalists Tom Adams, Daudi Mitsoki, Echlo, and Miro Shot getting in on the fun, as well as guitarist Jochen Arbeit from Einstürzende Neubauten, and Wähner who provides the solid, often unpredictable rhythmic foundation throughout. Beneath spiky guitars and crystalline synth melodies that lean into Arneodo's classical sensibilities, this is a record whose dark corners are filled with emotional trauma and mental health struggles.

TELL US MORE...

'Hopes' is one of the album's most triumphant moments, with Adams and Mitsoki singing optimistically about the freedom that only comes when endless hope is abandoned. Another highlight, 'Cast Stones', alternates fluidly between a frantic, insistent pulse and sullen vocals from Shot, but then snaps suddenly into a fragmented, heart-wrenching sequence of devastating melodies and buzzing blocks of synths. A deeply emotional and bold debut.

MAT SMITH

'Magnetar' is out now via Bandcamp

NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: **George Clinton – 'Atomic Dog'**

I'm very happy to see 'George Clinton & The Cosmic Odyssey Of The P-Funk Empire', the great man's biography I wrote 10 years ago, reactivated next month by Omnibus Press.

The original book morphed over 25 years from a P-Funk special Dance Music Report, the magazine I edited for Tommy Boy in NYC. That led to the first of many interviews and encounters with George, witnessing Funkadelic at Harlem Apollo and even DJing for him. It then became a labour of love with my late Helen, covering George's life through acid-fried capers, funk revolutions, 'Computer Games' and beyond, with excess all areas.

P-Funk was spiking its acid funk juggernauts with electronic effects and rhythms from the early 1970s. Keyboard genius Bernie Worrell ignited a whole new groove with 1977's 'Flash Light' as George gleefully wrangled existing forms into fresh dancefloor mutants by replanting them on Planet P-Funk and seeing what sprouted, from riff to robo-todger.

After the Parliament-Funkadelic Mothership crash-landed, Clinton began recording under his own name for Capitol because his groups were in legal limbo. In 1982, 'Computer Games' caught him fearlessly planting P-Funk at the forefront of the electronic revolution, bringing his old concepts up-to-date for the modern age.

Partly inspired by Nina's irrepressible Binky, I've chosen 1982's slavering electro-monster 'Atomic Dog'. Always a major fave as George made a stand for the human element and doggy-style fun on a panting groove beast that plunged clubs into leg-humping, tail-chasing, tongue-slobbering frenzies with its "Bow wow wow / Yippee yo yippee yay" chant. Using backwards drums that were later adopted by Detroit's techno militia, P-Funk had belched a massively influential dance sound that sent shockwaves through disco, hip hop and topped the US R&B chart. No tree was safe.

For the new book's cover praise, an early 70th birthday present came from Rickey Vincent, esteemed author of 'Funk: The Music, The People And The Rhythm Of The One':

"Kris Needs' ebullient offering tells the story of The Funk Mob the way it needs to be told! The extensive, slang-infested treatment is the best of the bios at capturing the illogical synchronicity of stank that inhabits the P-Funk. Most of all, for even the most dormant of us Maggots, Clones and Funkateers, it's a hilarious read!" That'll do.

Talking of books, Nina's wonderful 'Mrs Bun's Allotment Diaries And The Culinary Capers Of Felix & Pi' is out this month, published by Green Eyed. And then, watch this space!

'George Clinton & The Cosmic Odyssey Of The P-Funk Empire (Omnibus Remastered)' is published by Omnibus Press on 11 July

SIGNAL FLOW

Nifty patch cable solutions from down under

Modular synth enthusiasts will be well-versed in the perils of navigating tangles of patch cables while playing – even if they do look kind of cool. For their debut product, nascent Australian company Gammalite Systems have come up with a rather elegant solution in the form of Nest Tamers, which are designed to sit directly under module mounting screws. You can use them to create routes for patch cables to run between rows of modules, neatly grouped and free of the controls and patch points to keep them accessible for unfettered tweaking. With 20 in each £19.99 pack, it's a bargain solution. **gammalite-systems.com**

SOFA SO GOOD

Strickland boxset is a must-have

We've long been fans of Peter Strickland's cinematic work – ever since his Broadcast-soundtracked psychological-horror 'Berberian Sound Studio' was released in 2012, in fact. So the new 'Peter Strickland: A Curzon Collection' six-Blu-ray disc anthology is right up our street, and should be up yours too. It includes the aforementioned feature, plus his debut 'Katalin Varga' (2009), 'The Duke Of Burgundy' (2014), 'In Fabric' (2018) and 'Flux Gourmet' (2022) – a black comedy centred around a "sonic catering" group who elicit disturbing ASMR from sounds made by food. But that's not all folks, with over seven hours of special features included, from interviews to deleted scenes, collectible posters and even an enamel pin. That £70 price tag probably sounds quite reasonable now. **curzon.com**

LITTLE SURPRISES

Portable speaker is one for the summer

We all know that JBL can deliver on sound, but judging by their Authentics 300 portable home speaker, they can also excel in the looks department. Inspired by classicc JBL designs, with its boombox shape, leather-like enclosure and aluminium caste handle, its full stereo sound erupts from a pair of one-inch tweeters with eight hours of battery life. Mod cons are aplenty too – Bluetooth pairing, Wi-Fi streaming and the ability to use Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa simultaneously. One for your wish list. **uk.jbl.com**

ALL HAIL THE DING

New device pushes all the right buttons

Rainy Day Electronic Instruments is the brainchild of Toby Hendricks whose journey into electronics began in the early 2000s after cracking open his first Casio keyboard. Fast-forward to 2024, and he's now unveiling a beautifully petite sequencer called the Hailstorm, which offers four voices of sample and drum synthesis played using light-up capacitive touch strips. It works with MIDI in both directions over TRS and USB-C and boasts five performative effects in reverb, beat repeating, pitch shifting, filtering and, perhaps most impressively, a granular delay engine. A surefire steal at £400. **rainydayei.com**

GREAT SCOT

Book revisits key era north of the border

Grant McPhee's new book, 'Postcards From Scotland: Scottish Independent Music 1983-1995', is an excellent chronicle of the "radical transformation" of Scotland's indie scene, at a time when a myriad of bands had split or gone to London to chase major labels. It features a host of archival photographs and drawings, as well as more than 100 interviews with key artists of the period, including Teenage Fanclub, Cocteau Twins, The Jesus And Mary Chain and Primal Scream. Definitely one to add to your reading list, you can order a signed copy now for £25. **omnibuspress.com**

NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOSEF

History of beloved Edinburgh post-punkers

Though Josef K were the suave and sophisticated darlings of Scotland's 1980s post-punk scene, they're still not given proper due in the history books. Which is why 'Through The Crack In The Wall: The Secret History Of Josef K' is such a welcome surprise. Written by Johnnie Johnstone, and with a foreword by stand-up comedian Stewart Lee, the tome opens with the band's beginnings as spotty schoolboys in the south-west of Edinburgh and traces their sudden rise and fall, in a career that saw them record just one studio album, the masterpiece that is 'The Only Fun In Town'.

It's an absolutely ace read and is full of characters who cut against the grain. Like the band's lead vocalist Paul Haig, who once told Sounds, "I don't dislike rock stars – I just don't want to be one". Published this month by Jawbone Press, get your copy now for £16.99. **jawbonepress.com**

Suzanne Ciani describes the making of her groundbreaking effects track '**Xenon**' for the first-ever talking pinball machine. High score!

INTERVIEW: WILLIAM STOKES

"I was doing a lot of television commercials, where the idea was to create within a short space. Some of my sounds for AT&T were a third of a second. The Coca-Cola 'pop and pour' sound was just a little 'blip'. I had a logo for Columbia that was three seconds. So you got used to working in a small space, which allowed you to kind of micro-design sounds.

"I liked anything on the edge and I loved technology. I had to get the first one of this, the first one of that. My studio was just a beta-test site for all kinds of stuff. And I liked designing things and implementing them. Being on that edge was what inspired me.

"So the chip 'edge' was a new one back then. Chips were just being developed. And it was exciting because you could put this little thing into something and it had its own world of expression. They were putting them in washing machines and dishwashers and elevators and clothing. Well, at least, I was putting them in clothing!

"With 'Xenon', the composition itself isn't realised until the machine is played. And the player creates a composition. So it was an interesting project because I had to create these little modules of sound that would work together as they're triggered. And that could also build with the intensity of the game.

"I had a lot of instructions from the pinball company in terms of honouring the levels of achievement. I didn't know anything about that. I had to go with the reinforcement, creating intensity, giving rewards, having the thing grow… it's very subliminal. There are so many levels of communication with sound.

"One of the first things I did as part of my research was to go to Times Square, to a pinball centre. I was not a pinball player, so I stepped into this other world. I think the fact that I hadn't ever done it before meant I could see it in a new way. What I noticed most was the physicality of the interaction – people really use their bodies to play. If you bumped too hard, the game was over. But you had to interact. And I took that as a cue for my sounds.

"Some of the sounds were these grunts – I lowered my voice with an Eventide Harmonizer, I made these guttural sounds – and some, of course, were just… my being female! Because I always wanted technology to be sexy. There was a notion that it was this mechanistic, tough thing, but for me, it never was. I always thought of it as something sensual. I didn't realise until a lot later that a lot of boys were… responding to my voice!
I mean, I had this one line that went, 'Try me again'. It was just playful.

"'Welcome to Xenon…' the big deal about the female voice then is that it has a higher sampling rate. There was one machine before me that had

a voice in it or a grunt or something, I can't remember what it was, but it was low-pitched. It takes more data to reproduce something in a high range because you have more cycles for the wavelength. You know, if you've got 400 cycles then you need more computing power than if you just have one. So this was the first machine with a female voice.

"It's a phenomenal experience to see how a change in your voice changes your persona completely, changes who you are. I had an actual full-blown identity called Steve. He was a rapper back then. And he did three songs, 'Steve Goes To A Party', 'Steve Saves The World' and 'Steve Wishes You A Happy Birthday'. And I would hear my voice through the Harmonizer, and I became this person. Steve would say things that I could never say.

"'Xenon' had a lot of voice processing. When I appeared on 'The David Letterman Show', I brought the Voice Box with me, which was a horizontal rack filled with units that had to do with voice processing – compressors, filters, harmonisers, vocoder, effects… all these things that I could control very quickly. There were lots of reasons as to why I did that but, needless to say, I had a fascination with vocal processing and have used it a lot.

"The biggest limitation in music for me was that I didn't sing. When I'd go to record companies to get a deal, they'd say, 'What!? You don't sing? You don't play guitar?'. The only expression open to recording artists who were women was singing. I was a composer. I wasn't a singer and I wasn't a pop artist. I've never fitted into the most popularly accepted musical forms. I'm always on the edge – in the trenches, somehow.

"People in the background of the industry have always known what I do. In technology, there was a lot of communication and testing back and forth, working directly with the companies. I designed sounds for the Yamaha DX7, I worked with Roland, with New England Digital… that was my playground, really. Audio engineering society. It wasn't until many years later that I was invited into the Pinball Hall Of Fame.

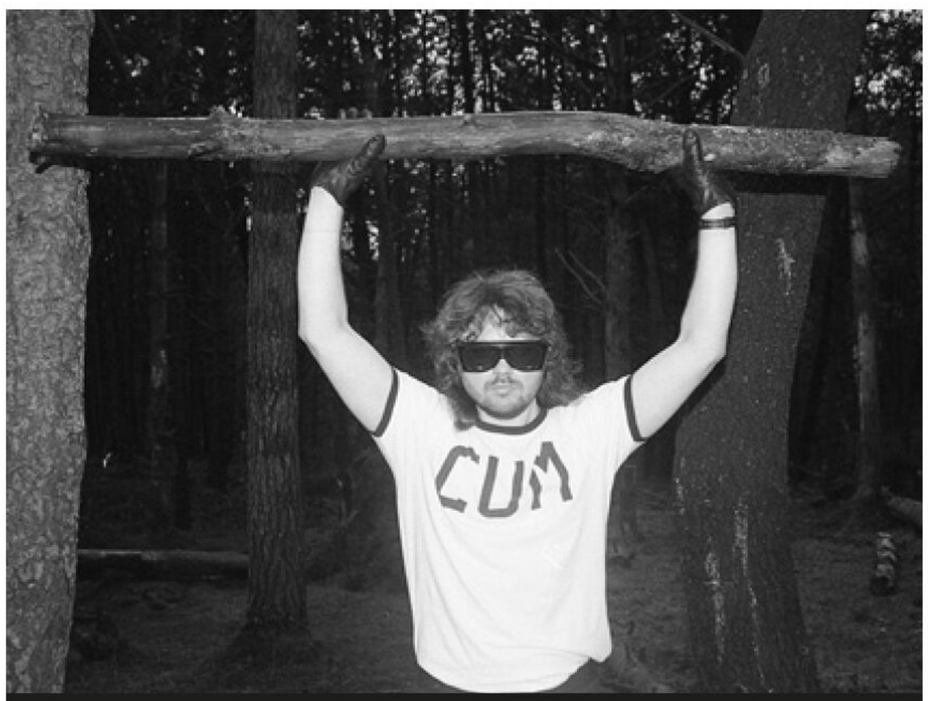
"You know now, for the first time in my life, with this new generation of kids going back to analogue, I finally have a door open to actually communicate. Because in the old days, it wasn't understood. Nobody had a little analogue machine sitting in their room. I couldn't talk to somebody who even knew what it was. They'd look at the wires and think it was a switchboard. So I'm just really happy that I'm alive right now!"

The 'Xenon' effects have been reissued as a seven-inch single by Finders Keepers

ON THE RHODES AGAIN

Company release Earth Day model

In celebration of Earth Day, held annually on 22 April, Rhodes released this tasty MK8 Earth Edition piano alongside a tree-planting campaign this year. The instrument exhibits all the quality you'd expect from the brand, but what we really like is the effort that has gone into making the piano sustainable. All the wood used is FSC-certified and the lid is made from recycled materials. Rhodes have also pledged to plant 500 trees for each of the 50 limited edition MK8s that are sold. They're only a couple of grand more expensive than their standard model, and you can get one for £9,995. **rhodesmusic.com**



PULSE

DIMITRI

South Yorkshire synthpop maestro

WHO?

Dimitri is an enigmatic synthpopper whose brilliant new EP, 'Probably A Metaphor', is a distinct gear-change from his former calling as a, er, nightclub impressario. "DIMITRI's was just off Junction 33 on the M1 motorway," he explains. "It's been up for sale for five years now, so please get in touch if you know anyone who needs to buy a nightclub. Other business ventures have included Dima, a lifestyle scent and Dimilkrem, a caffeinated alcoholic milk drink. Dimilkrem is still available to purchase in bulk from my warehouse. I say warehouse, it used to be a nightclub."

WHY DIMITRI?

"These songs were created as adverts for my products," he continues. "But people seemed to enjoy the music more than the products, and I realised I could use music to give them messages and make them happy." Said messages include 'My Blessed Device', a Cabaret Voltaire-esque paean to the tribulations of modern technology. "Spellcheck is great for e-communicating with people," muses Dimitri. "However, I am very amused by how a machine can correct you over spelling, since words are made up. If I want to spell a word a certain way, they should let me."

TELL US MORE...

The EP's closing track, 'Yes To An Antique Ghost Reading', sounds like mid-1980s Depeche Mode playing a Bontempi keyboard around a battered Ouija board. "It was created to perform seances to," he claims. "At Dimitri live shows, the audience is encouraged to bring an item related to a deceased loved one and, with their permission, I attempt to contact the departed through the item. The music helps me enter a trance-like state, which has been scientifically proven to help with clairvoyance."

BOB FISCHER

'Probably A Metaphor' is out now on Do It Thissen

SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** has found what may well be the first electronic demo record in the world

This is the oldest record we've looked at so far. It was released in 1930 on the RCA Victor label and is effectively the earliest demonstration disc out there, with the RCA Theremin being put through its paces by one Lennington H Shewell on two tracks, 'Lover Come Back To Me!' from the musical comedy 'The New Moon' (by Oscar Hammerstein II and Sigmund Romberg), and 'Dancing With Tears In My Eyes' (by Alexander Dubin and Joseph A Burke).

Lennington H Shewell became a professional thereminist and toured the world demonstrating the RCA Theremin, after his father, George Dunbar Shewell – a vice president at RCA, brought one home from work to try out. RCA had secured the patent to manufacture theremins in the USA from the instrument's inventor, Leon Theremin. They paid $1 million for it, according to an interview with Lennington in the Philadelphia Inquirer in December 1950.

Despite his father being a trained musician, it was young Lennington who mastered the instrument, playing by ear. Within a week, he was entertaining his father's friends and colleagues. A few weeks later, there was a concert launching the instrument at the Electric Show at the Convention Hall in Philadelphia, but the artist booked to play didn't show, so Lennington took his place. That one concert kickstarted his career as a professional thereminist, and he is reported to have earned $22,000 that year – nearly $375,000 in today's money.

Lennington played over 3,000 concerts in his time as a professional player, and in 1934 visited the UK with his theremin. He played an informal concert for the then Prince of Wales and Mrs Simpson, but as he wasn't allowed to play any paying gigs in the UK thanks to labour laws, he headed back to the USA.

RCA only made 500 theremins before ceasing production. Soon after the instrument's debut, the stock market crashed and the last documented sale of an RCA Theremin was in 1932. Not many people wanted an expensive and difficult-to-master spooky sound machine, it seems.

Lennington never stopped playing his theremin, but he became a stockbroker after his UK visit. He died in 1978.

ANY WHICH PLAY

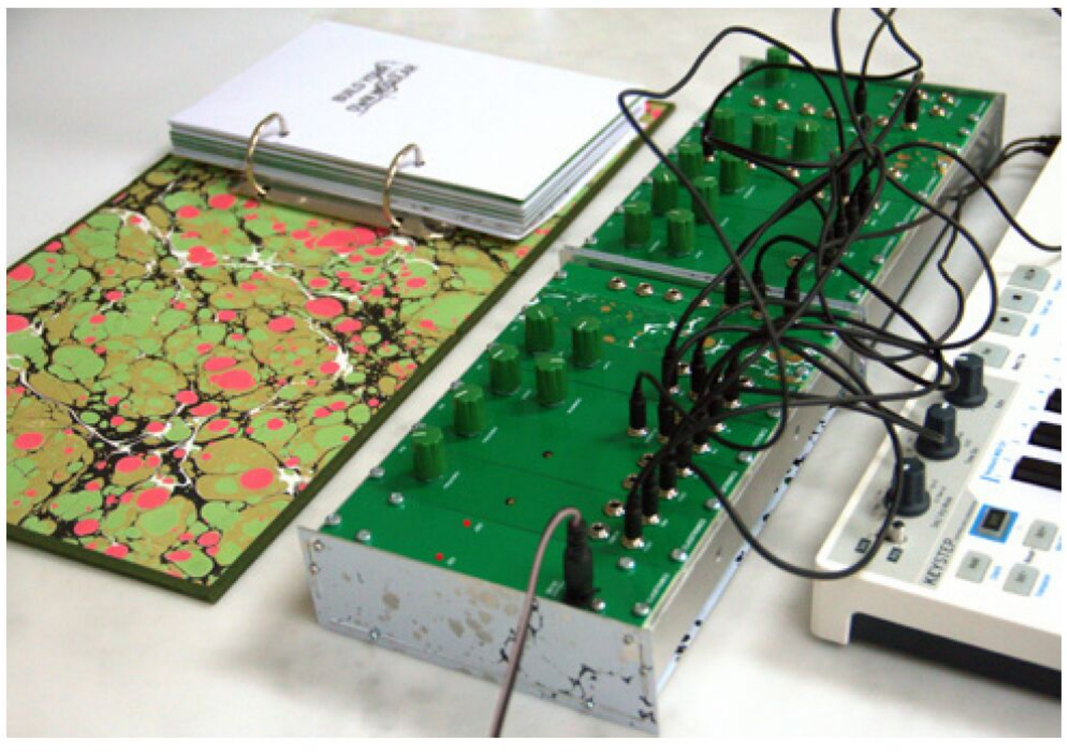
Strummable synths from France

BLL Instruments' new Elyra synthesiser is designed to be played more like a stringed instrument than a desktop one, with two different "strumming areas" allowing back-and-forth strumming and bass-style playing respectively. It has fittings for a strap, can accommodate all the typical playing gestures and is ambidextrous to boot, though its makers insist it's also at home on a table or on your lap. On top of all that, the Elyra's virtual analogue sound engine is developed by synth experts and fellow French company Kodamo, who are well-respected. That's some serious performance power for £880. **bllinstruments.com**

A FEEL-GOOD STORY

DIY modular system kit in book form

Clacktronics is the one-man operation of London synth builder Ben Barwise, who recently announced a tremendously exciting and valuable resource in 'Build Your Own Modular', a hand-made, how-to guide for anyone with modular ambitions. Featuring a page of actual printed circuit board to be pushed out and assembled, he's given instructions on how to construct 12 modules, including VCOs, a filter, mixer and even a case. So for just £228, by the end you'll have a fully functional, mini Eurorack system. What's not to like? Order one before this limited-edition run sells out. **clacktronics.co.uk**



THE NEW BLOCKADERS / GRINDER-WITHOUT-ORGANS / THE THEATRICAL PANOPTICON

An extended collaboration between TNB & G-w-O, and two live recordings of anti-theatre premiered at Cafe OTO (London, UK) and Audio Foundation (Auckland, NZ). The set also includes a link to access a bonus film and extra, printable material. See:

SCAN ME

CD1 is an hour-long part studio / part live collaboration between seminal anti-music stalwarts THE NEW BLOCKADERS, and purveyors of the absurd, GRINDER-WITHOUT-ORGANS. Collaged musique concrète.

CD2 opens with G-w-O Live at Cafe OTO - "Showcasing a singer who has no voice, musicians who have no instruments, and a band leader who has no direction."

The 2CD set concludes with THE THEATRICAL PANOPTICON - "A stage play performed in a void infected with accidental somniloquies."

2CD in 6-panel matt digipak with 8pp booklet feat TNB & G-w-O art.

TENHORNEDBEAST

Capra Hircus

Shimmering, heathen drone from TenHornedBeast, the ritual project of Christopher Walton (Endvra).

If there is a heathenry left on this island, it is to be found at the places where the wild goats gather, in the secret valleys and alongside nameless burns. They are the Children of Pan in an Arcadia that straddles both the imagination and the real world.

"Beautifully eerie... the perfect soundtrack of forest-like quality"
(Vital Weekly)

"Ineffably beautiful, like wild Nature herself"
(Dave Aftandilian)

YouTube

SCAN ME

WWW.COLDSPRING.CO.UK | COLDSPRING.BANDCAMP.COM

SERIOUS FUN

Novel sequencer and looper

The PlayFader from developer Play All Day is a two-channel CV, gate and MIDI sequencer/looper. Its delightful interface consists of just two faders and eight coloured buttons, and CV and gate outputs are controlled by its fader and play button. It's versatile, and can output notes, chords, CCs and more over two channels of MIDI, while also comfortably interfacing with your modular synth over CV, and even your guitar pedals' expression inputs to open up some truly cosmic axe-flavoured possibilities.

"The inspiration for the PlayFader came from a desire to simplify and provide new opportunities for performance and sequencing, seamlessly merging them into a single workflow," says company director Andrew "Hadj" Hadjiantoni. "It's a device that connects to pretty much anything on stage, studio or laptop, you can even power it from your phone – cable included, of course."

And when it comes to performance, the PlayFader will happily roll, randomise and bend notes any which way you please, and even has a built-in accelerometer. Not bad for £415.

goplayallday.com

PULSE

ROSIE TEE

Brum's psych queen hits a home run

WHO?

Technicolour, retro-futuristic pop conjurer is the latest guise of Birmingham multi-instrumentalist, composer and performer Rosie Tee. Drawing on her Polish roots and folk music past, she crafts beguiling aural narratives from fragments of electronica, jazz, psych and avant-pop. Her debut six-track mini-album, 'Night Creature', has just dropped on her own Kikimora imprint, a label aimed at amplifying the sounds emanating from the verdant avant-garde scene of the Midlands.

WHY ROSIE TEE?

There must be something in the water in Moseley, the area of Brum where Tee lives, and you can hear the sonic sediment of local legends like Pram and Broadcast floating around in her psychedelic flow. Just take the hallucinatory opening chimes and free-jazz breakdowns of 'Lectern', or the toybox rhythms of the title track, packed with melodic pop nouse. It would give Kate Bush and Goldfrapp a serious run for their money – pop that isn't scared to confuse or surprise – and was written in an old church in the Brecon Beacons with a quartet of collaborators, perfected over two years of touring and rehearsing. The live band brings a warm analogue feel to contrast with the digital adventuring, which alongside Tee's surrealist, imaginative lyrics and sweet vocals, makes for an otherworldly sound trip.

TELL US MORE...

Tee is a real Midlands mover and shaker. As well as being part of the Supersonic Festival crew and holding her own NightGarden festival up in Manchester in July, she has created immersive public installations for Coventry City of Culture and Birmingham's Commonwealth Games, plus orchestral arrangements for the likes of Warwick's Orchestra Of The Swan and the Dutch ensemble Orkest De Ereprijs.

JAMES THORNHILL

'Night Creature' is out now on Kikimora

TIME MACHINE

Paul Hartnoll remembers **Orbital**'s era-defining Glastonbury headline performance of 1994, which thrust electronic dance music into the spotlight like never before

WORDS: PAUL CLARKE

"I'm just a foot soldier in the trenches of techno," says Paul Hartnoll with a smile. "It's not for me to say how the battle is going."

The man best-known as one half of Orbital is considering whether their iconic performance at Glastonbury in 1994 ranks with Bob Dylan at Newport Folk Festival in 1965 or the Sex Pistols at Manchester Free Trade Hall in 1976 – two pivotal moments that changed the course of modern music.

What is indisputable is that he and his brother Phil proved that dance music could conquer one of the biggest stages at a festival which had pretty much ignored electronic beats until that point. And before he walked onto The Other Stage that June evening, Paul was feeling the pressure.

"I felt like I was going to vomit!" he admits. "Björk was supposed to be headlining, but our manager had persuaded her to swap with us. I saw her standing behind the curtain before she went on looking really pale like a little child. Then 'Human Behaviour' started and I heard the roar of the crowd. She seemed to grow into a goddess about eight feet tall and stepped onstage while I started dry heaving over a bucket."

It didn't help that Orbital were playing a set of mainly brand new material. The gig was only the third date on a tour promoting 'Snivilisation' and their third album's release had just been delayed until August, meaning that even diehard fans wouldn't recognise most of what they were about to hear.

"There's nothing like playing a completely new set to 40,000 people to focus you," he says, laughing. "We didn't know that you should probably play all your hits at a massive festival and the biggest gig you've ever done. But then again, those 40,000 weren't all Orbital fans, so it didn't matter if we were playing new stuff or old, as long as we were playing good stuff they could dance to."

Indeed, Paul believes the fact he and Phil were "flying by the seat of our pants", spurred on the crowd's raucous energy and wild euphoria.

"Afterwards, I spoke to my mate Rob who used to run Warp Records. He was in the audience and said that the bit where the snare came in on 'Are We Here?' was 'fucking *amazing*!'.

"Now, when I was onstage, I'd been panicking because I couldn't actually find the snare! I thought the channel on the desk had gone down, so I'd cranked the volume right up. Then I realised it was on a different pattern, and this big jungle snare came in. I thought, 'That's way too loud', but that was this big ecstatic moment for Rob and the audience."

Just one year earlier, Paul had been in the audience at The Other Stage watching The Orb bring the house down.

"The place erupted when they dropped 'Little Fluffy Clouds'," he recalls. "I thought, 'That's what people need – why isn't there more dance music?'.

I mean, dance music had been hammering out since ’86 and was well over-ground by 1990, but there still hadn’t really been anything on the big stages. The Shamen headlined in 1992, but that’s kind of indie dance, and The Orb were ambient dance. No one had done full-on dance music, so I was really chuffed when we were asked to play, thinking that we were the people who were going to do that.”

Paul was more than just “chuffed” when the lights finally went up on their set.

“I was glowing for 24 hours,” he says. “I felt like my job here was done. I never needed to achieve anything else in my life.”

However, rather than being a reason for Orbital to hang up their trademark torch specs and retire, Paul says those awe-inspiring 60 minutes in Somerset “opened the floodgates”.

The next year, Glastonbury organised a dedicated dance tent for the first time in the festival’s history, which has now mushroomed into the vast Silver Hayes and Block9 areas. Meanwhile, Orbital themselves have become practically permanent fixtures, with the highlights of various performances captured on the ‘Orbital Live At Glastonbury 1994-2004’ compilation.

That 1994 performance also set the blueprint and standard for the kind of stadium techno that saw contemporaries like Underworld, Leftfield and The Prodigy reach headline status and, with Daft Punk, helped electronic dance music break into the American mainstream.

“Dance music’s never presented itself very well live,” says Paul. “For me, it was more about the kind of shows people like Kraftwerk, Tangerine Dream and Front 242 put on. I was never really a Pink Floyd fan, but I admired their thing of, ‘Don’t look at us, we’re just these men at the front getting on with it. Watch these visuals instead.’

“When we started out, it had been fun driving around in a Datsun with all our stuff in shopping bags to jam at club nights like Eddie Richards’ Outer Limits, but once we started playing gigs in ‘proper’ venues, we realised we needed something more.

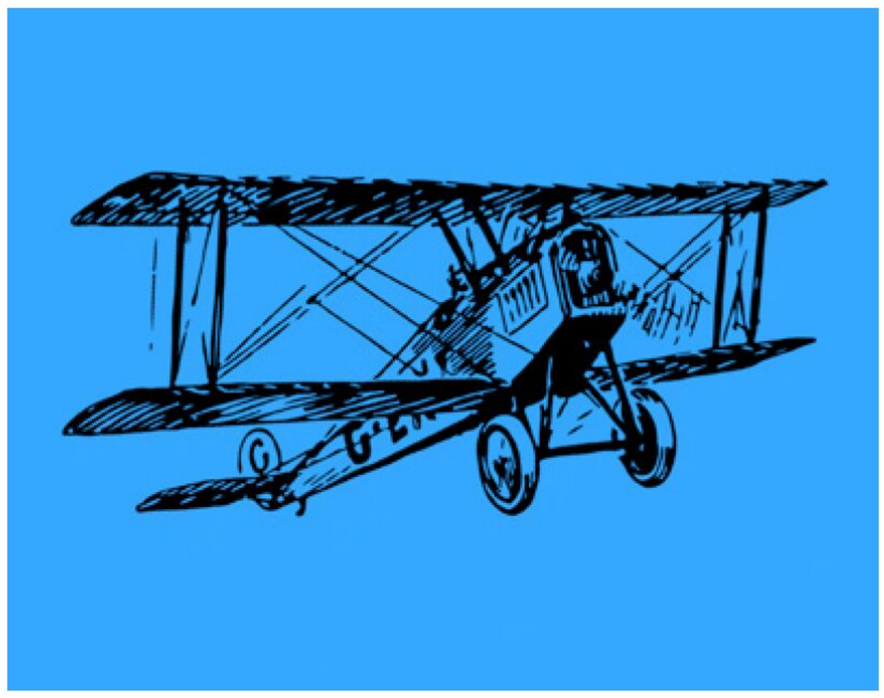
“So Glastonbury was an important gig, but I didn’t think about us then being allowed to play what were still called ‘rock’ festivals. It was really great to go from being thought of as second-class citizens in dance music and the idea of ‘the computer just making music for you’, to the world of ‘grown-up’ music.”

In the end, the foot soldiers of techno didn’t just win the battle. They won the whole war.

Orbital play The Park Stage at Glastonbury Festival, 26-30 June

BANGING ON

More random musings from **Fat Roland**. On his mind this month (as far as we can tell) are **Gig Flyers**



"Here mate, you wanna flyer? Go on, take a flyer. It's for my new club night, Fat Roland's Wet Synth Disco. We plug in a load of old Moogs and have a foam party until liquid gets into the electronics and sets everything on fire."

Yes, it sounds like a death trap, but I bet I could get an audience if I had flyers to give out.

Gig flyers used to be everywhere. You'd be out in the town centre, and some pimpled herbert in a snap-buttoned tracksuit would shove a crumpled flyer in your face. Your shopping bag would end up comprising 30 per cent ill-fitting work shirts from Burton and 70 per cent crumpled scraps of paper advertising gigs called things like "60s Night At The Frog & Sperm", "Creepy Clive's Ambient Shower" or some kind of experimental twaddle called "Grievous Bodily Harmonica". You would never go to any of them, but it was nice to be invited.

Here's my complete guide to designing a gig flyer. Usually I charge 10 pence for this advice, so count yourself lucky, yeah? Block text or handwritten only – none of this cursive nonsense. Or braille. Do the whole thing in braille. Don't pay for fancy graphics, use clip art from Microsoft Word – choose a party popper, "LOL" in a speech bubble or an office worker pointing at a graph. Forget to put the date on, so you've got to scrawl it on in felt-tip afterwards. Once you've finished your design, pop to a printers and say technical things like "a thousand gsm" and "I want it proper oblong".

Distribute your flyers from the air. Steal a biplane and a pilot called Eustace. Honestly, if you aren't allowed to low-fly haphazardly over crowded shopping centres, then it's health and safety gone mad. No-one likes taking flyers on the high street. People's responses fall into one of three categories – (a) apathy, (b) apathy followed by a punch on the nose or (c) apathy, a nose punch, and an extended wrestle ending with both of you careening into an unreasonable number of stacked avocados at a fruit and veg stall.

Flyers are a relic of the past, like salad dressing, krautrock and the Mesopotamians. Everyone uses Facebook, Bandcamp and SausageMachine these days. People press a button to say they are "interested" in your event, which is online code for, "I'm very much not interested in your stupid event". I know you miss flyers too because one half of your brain is reading this and the other half is trying to work out if SausageMachine is something I made up. I will tell you next month. On laminated five-by-seven-inch paper. Given to you by a pimpled herbert.

CHEAT CODE

Roland reproduction saves your bank account

Oh, that's just our Behringer clone alarm ringing again because their new MS-5 replica of Roland's 1976 SH-5 is out in the wild and ready for its knobs to be twiddled. Three years in development, this "faithful reproduction" is precisely that, arriving loaded with the original SH-5 circuit and 37 semi-weighted keys, two VCOs, two LFOs, four switchable waveforms, as well as a ring modulator. Given that a bona fide SH-5 fetches insane prices online these days, you can't go far wrong with this one, which sells for a pleasing £549. **behringer.com**

ELAPHON IN THE ROOM

Hand-crafted instrument draws on tradition

This is the frankly stunning Œil Sympathique, an electroacoustic resonator which will provide you with a beautifully unique method of sound creation. Consisting of an acoustic body made of maple, walnut and mahogany, with a bed of 24 tuneable resonant strings and a loudspeaker, it has an integrated contact microphone to be used as a pickup or to generate feedback loops. Its German developer Elaphon says it was crafted according to the principles of instrument making, with each unit one-of-a-kind, which helps to explain its premium price tag of £2,735.

"It is not about one being better or more authentic than the other," they say. "It is about possibilities. The Œil Sympathique reconnects with innovations of early electronic music that were forgotten with the advent of amplifiers and transistors, and later, effects. These are now waiting to be rediscovered." What are you hanging around for? **elaphon.com**

GOT THE T-SHIRT

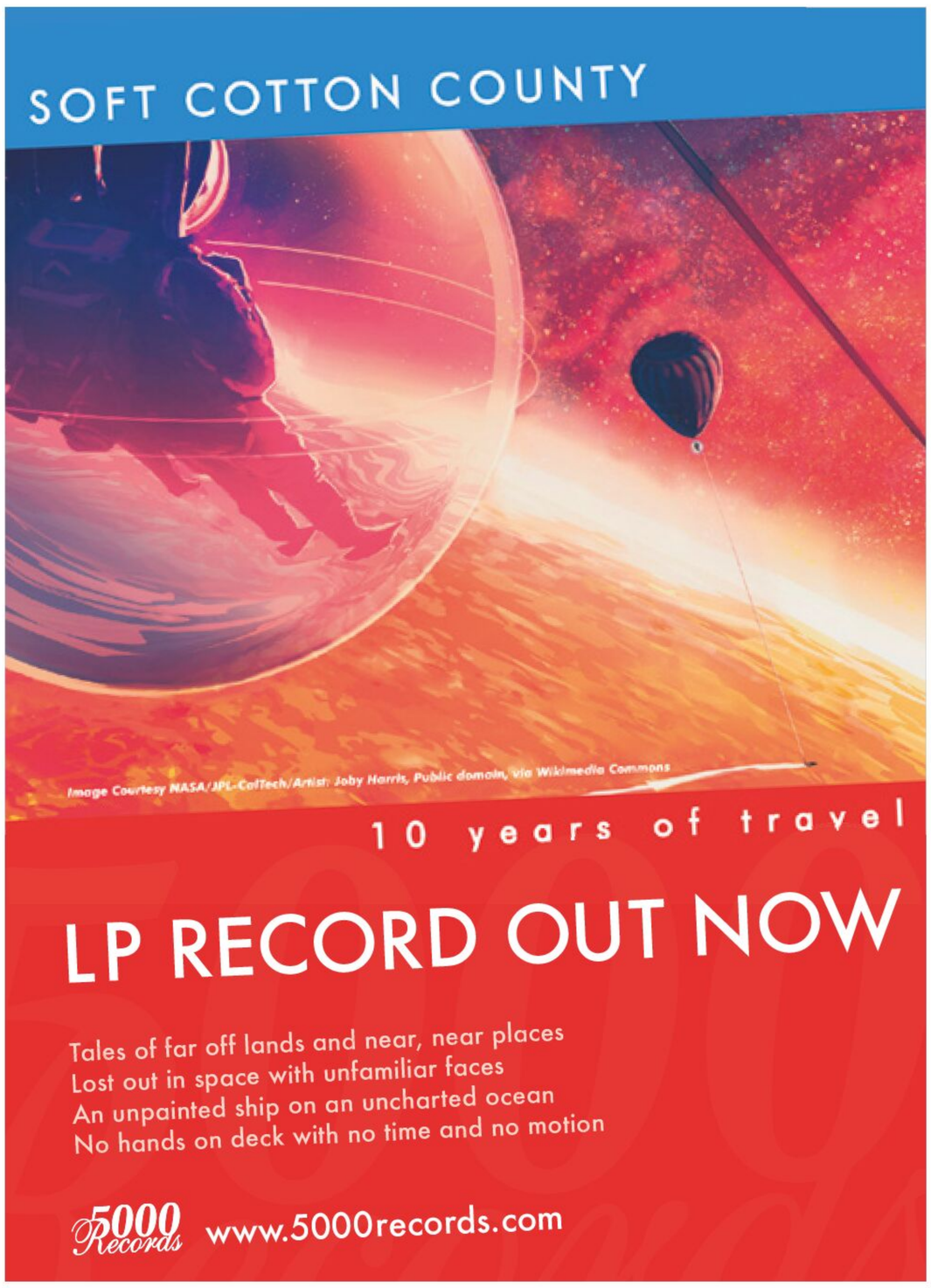
Tome collects the best artist logos

Aphex. Nirvana. AC/DC. These days you'll find many artist logos adorning the front of T-shirts, but what do you know about the backstory to these iconic designs? Enter 'Logo Rhythm: Band Logos That Rocked The World', a book that aims to fully explore where the logos came from and explain how they became an integral part of music culture. There's a decent chunk of original artwork to be found in this too, as well as insights and tales from the likes of The Beatles art director John Kosh and David Bowie designer Jonathan Barnbook. Out now in hardback for £55 – don't hang about. **accartbooks.com**

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Say hello to the artist-friendly lamp

Dyson's recent Solarcycle™ Morph light is an essential for writers, illustrators, producers and just about any creative who finds themselves up late with a coffee in hand. Intelligent local daylight tracking adapts to give the perfect light at all times and its motion sensors help to save energy when you're away from your workstation. Available as either a floor or desk lamp at £649.99 and £499.99 respectively, this is literally a lifetime investment. **dyson.co.uk**



PHILOSOPHER'S TONE

Parisian developer asks the big questions

Could sound be the architect of all matter? That's the question preoccupying a Parisian design duo going by the name of Cyma Forma, whose answer lies with their new synthesiser, the ALT. This five-voice machine promises "a rich, spatial audio experience" and a rich kinetic, tactile experience thanks to its 24 faders, a modulation pin matrix and even light and sound sensors to "react and evolve" with various environmental stimuli. A harmonic quantiser also allows users to choose scales and play melodies with either its faders or quantised pitch modulation, and on top of that, there's an onboard delay providing infinite feedback. And lovers of classic synths will be glad to hear its stereo filter is very much inspired by the snarling Korg MS-20.

"We believe sound may hold answers," say the company. "We aspire to make instruments that ask questions." The Kickstarter campaign is now active, with shipping set for January 2025. **cymaforma.com**

PRESS AHEAD

Esteemed publisher finds a home

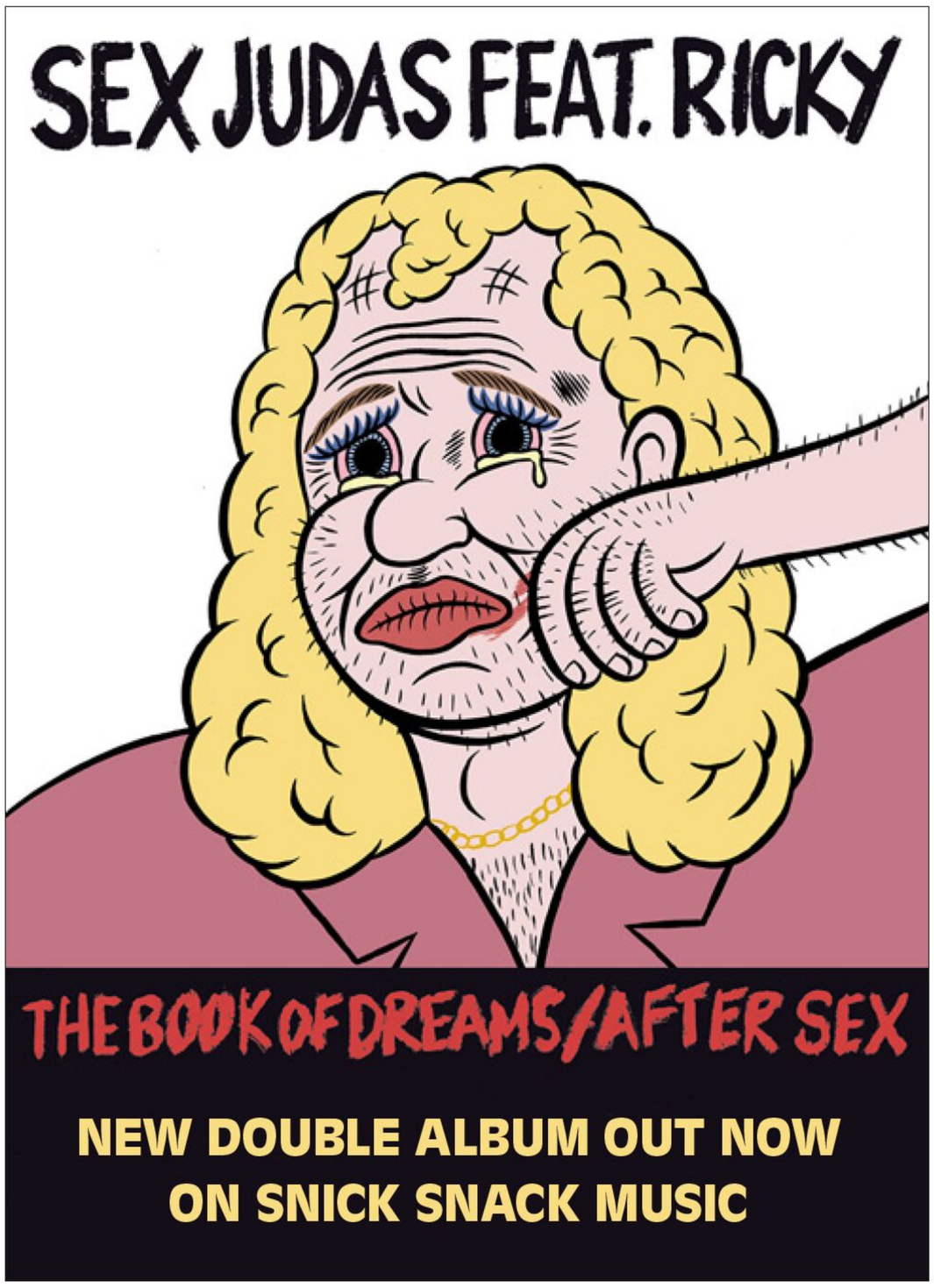
Barely a month goes by when we're not shouting about some ace new music tome being put out by Velocity Press, so their recent opening of a bookshop in south London is good news indeed. Since launching in November 2019 with their first title, the wonderful 'Join The Future: Bleep Techno And The Birth Of British Bass Music', they've gone from strength to strength, releasing almost 40 titles to date."We've stepped up our schedule this year and are now publishing books monthly, so we needed a home for our launch parties," says the owner, Colin Steven. "I'd say it will be 90 per cent Velocity Press titles, but I'm also going to stock other books, zines, posters and art. I particularly want to support local publishers and artists." Pay them a visit at Holdrons Arcade in Peckham. **velocitypress.uk**

VELOCITY PRESS

KEY READING

Minimoog history is a thing of beauty

Bjooks Publishing have previously covered both Roland and Korg, but their latest release, 'The Minimoog Book', charts the evolution of arguably Moog's most venerated machine. Written by synth historian Joe Silva, it chronicles five decades of the Minimoog from very early prototypes to the Minimoog Voyager and the present day. There are interviews with Kraftwerk, Devo, Gary Numan and Tony Visconti and we've not even touched on the various "schematics, historical promotional materials, engineering interviews, illustrated sound patches and over 70 artist features". Get your preorders in for this essential coffee-table book, with shipping expected in September. **bjooks.com**



Outsider art, rave tapes and dancing like a lunatic have all shaped BBC Radio 6 Music presenter **Tom Ravenscroft** – aside from being the son of John Peel, of course

INTERVIEW: MAT SMITH

RAVE TAPE PACKS

"My friends and I were obsessed with rave tape packs from the mid-1990s. Things like 'Dreamscape', 'Mindwarp', 'Helter Skelter' and 'United Dance'. I was only 15 and was too young to go to raves. I also lived in the Suffolk countryside and most of them took place in Milton Keynes or Stevenage. We collected flyers for the events from record shops and would re-live the raves in our bedrooms. Tape one would go on at nine o'clock at night, and we'd go through them until they'd finished at seven in the morning.

"They've stayed part of my musical taste – I still buy old ones now on eBay. I listen to them in the car when I'm driving back home from working for the BBC in Manchester. There's a 'Dreamscape 10' pack which I still regularly listen to when I feel myself getting a bit tired on the drive."

MOTORBIKIN'

"When I was a teenager, my dad and I would get up very early in the morning and sneak off to Donington and Brands Hatch to watch bike races. We used to go to the Isle of Man TT races, but I don't think we ever really took much notice of who won the thing. I loved the noise, as much as anything else.

"Because of watching racing, I desperately wanted a Kawasaki AR50. It was essentially a scooter, but was built to make it look like a mini sports bike. I finally got one when I was 15, but until I was 16, all I could do was ride to the bins and back, which was about 20 metres. I must have ridden to the bins maybe 400 or 500 times. On my 16th birthday, I got the certificate I needed to bypass the bins. To this day, the greatest, most liberating feeling I've ever had in my life was the first time I went past the bins."

COOKING UP A STORM

"Apart from music, cooking might be the thing I love most in the world. It's the process – I find it very calming. My favourite place to start is with a tin of tomatoes. There's something very hopeful about a tin of tomatoes, it could become anything. They're a sort of a gateway to a relaxing moment for me. There's always a weird amount of them in our house.

"I really do tune out. My wife has kind of caught on to it. Sometimes I'll start cooking and she'll be like, 'It doesn't take 10 hours to make a pasta sauce'. Sometimes, by the time I actually take the sauce off the boil, I realise I don't really have any use for it and I just put it in the freezer. I've got four kids and my wife's very busy with her work, so I started batch cooking. It means I have a real excuse now."

TASK MANAGEMENT

"My mum's dad, Dennis, was a hero of mine. He was a Yorkshireman from Shipley, and he would spend a lot of time at our house. He was a very unassuming, hard-working man. Every morning he would get up and start fixing something. Over the years, I would go with him without much chat about what we were going to do. We'd wander around and find things to mend in a very unprofessional, rudimentary way.

PHOTO: BBC

"I get up in the morning and immediately try to find a task. And it's not me being wholesome. It's just that I'm not very good at sitting down. I need to find something to do straight away, even if it doesn't necessarily need doing, isn't urgent or even hugely beneficial. People I work with get really annoyed with me. They're like, 'Please, just sit down'."

CHIMURENGA MUSIC

"The chimurenga band The Four Brothers played at our house for my dad's 50th birthday party because he was in love with them. I was transfixed and danced like a lunatic all night to this band. It seems crazy that these four guys from Zimbabwe were playing in a field in Suffolk. Listening to The Four Brothers ultimately led me to Thomas Mapfumo. For me, he became a musician I felt very personal about and didn't want to share. He's also the first person whose records I started collecting.

"I guess my introduction to almost all music was very unnatural, because of my dad. We were getting taken to music festivals when we were 10. Taking a four-year-old to a festival seems very ordinary now, but we were the only kids at Reading Festival in 1992. People stared at us like we were freaks."

'TWIN PEAKS'

"We watched 'Twin Peaks' when it went out on British TV for the first time in 1990. I definitely should not have been watching it when I was 10 years old. I think we all just assumed that we were sitting down to watch whatever the new version of 'Morse' was. I couldn't look in a mirror for years because I thought my face would turn into Killer Bob, but it opened my mind up to the idea that things don't have to make sense and you don't have to get frustrated by not being able to understand things.

"I really got into cinema after 'Twin Peaks' – Kurosawa, Wim Wenders and French New Wave films. I went to film school obviously in the hope of getting a job. It didn't happen, but it introduced me to the world of art."

OUTSIDER ART

"Raw Vision is an international journal of outsider art. The artists are untrained. My wife gave me a subscription when we first met, and it really opened my eyes to people making art without really thinking about what it is they want to achieve or even why they're doing it. It's just the impulse to make something.

"Raw Vision means that my wife and I buy cheap paintings everywhere we go – we have hundreds of them and our walls are covered. Outsider art is a lot like making art for yourself. It seems so strange now, in the world of social media where everyone's posting pictures of their sandwiches, the idea of making art and not telling anyone about it. Raw Vision is a glimpse into that alternative world."

Tom Ravenscoft will be broadcasting from Glastonbury, 26-30 June, as part of the BBC's coverage of the festival

WHEELY GOOD

Modular and modernist storage on wheels

Looking like a piece of furniture you might find in the home of Dieter Rams, these sleek airline storage carts from Thai company Elements Eden should be a high priority for any design nerds out there with a penchant for functional aesthetics. With several different sizes available, and the option to add shelves and pad covers, prices range between £500 and £600 and you'll need to contact the company to order due to their bespoke nature. While some artists might call their studios laboratories, these units make it a reality.
elementseden.com

FEEL THE ENIGI

Cult 90s synth is reborn

Taking inspiration from the Orgone Accumulator and its radical developer Wilhelm Reich, the Orgon Systems Enigiser synth was designed back in 1996 by 26-year-old Geoff Waterston with a view to serving dance music producers. Its legacy has now been resurrected thanks to Analog Sweden, a boutique developer based in Malmö, whose SWEnigiser features the same fundamental architecture of its forerunner. With one oscillator, a sub-oscillator and a filter, it also adds a slew of functional expansions, including a MIDI section, CV expander section with buffered input and output, an audio input, a noise generator and more. Now would be the time to withdraw that £1,651. **unzunz.com**

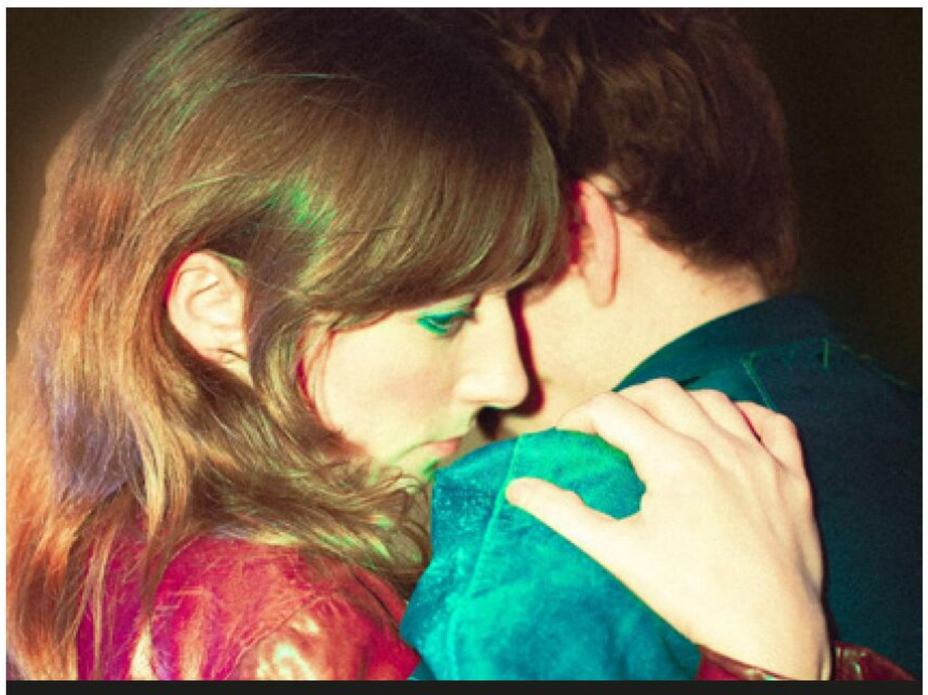
BIG NAME ON CAMPUS

Radiophonic star honoured in new uni building

Delia Derbyshire's groundbreaking achievements in sound design for BBC radio and television drama in the 1960s (at the time, uncredited) have been commemorated in her home city of Coventry, with a new university building housing its Arts and Society facilities named in her honour. To celebrate its inauguration, BBC Radio 6 DJ Stuart Maconie and industrial music spearhead Cosey Fanni Tutti – whose latest book 'Re:Sisters' links her trailblazing feminist creativity to Derbyshire's audio sculpture and Margery Kempe's autobiographical writing – spoke about Derbyshire's consistent artistic innovation in the face of institutionalised sexism.

"Delia Derbyshire is one of the most significant musicians of the modern era, who realised perhaps the most influential piece of electronic music ever, the 'Doctor Who' theme, which fired the imaginations of generations," said Maconie. "I'm delighted to be part of this landmark commemoration of her in her hometown."

Coventry University Dean Sean Hides hopes that her inspiration will unearth "the next Delia Derbyshire and 100 others who are doing things we can't even envisage yet". **coventry.ac.uk**



PULSE

THE ITCH

1980s-inspired duo score big with debut

WHO?

Georgia Hardy and Simon Tyrie are The Itch, a cerebral electropop act from London. They formed last year, though the pair have known each other since they were teenagers, learning to DJ together with a view to organising club nights. The Itch grew out of a desire to channel their blatant love for 80s-inspired electronics and enigmatic, atmospheric synths.

WHY THE ITCH?

Outside of their music, the duo retain a level of mystery through their conspicuous lack of social media presence, and by changing the musicians who play alongside them for every gig they perform. Few groups would actively choose not to market themselves on social media nowadays, almost none would have the bare-faced cheek to put out a seven-minute track as their debut release. But that's exactly what The Itch have done with 'Ursula', a part-brooding, part-vitalising synth epic that pays homage to American sci-fi author Ursula K Le Guin. Featuring four different sections which play their own distinct part in the song's narrative – sounding more like movements within a synth symphony – each builds on the last. The most effective of these unfolds over first three minutes of the track, bringing together glitchy electronics, plaintive melodies, Tyrie's pleading vocal and refreshingly pithy lyrics like, "We could bring down the government / We could put their heads on spikes".

TELL US MORE...

While there's no sign of a debut album just yet, Hardy and Tyrie do have some more singles in the pipeline, with 'The Influencer' and 'No More Sprechgesang' revealing a punchier, more concise side to The Itch's suspenseful, commanding sound. And one thing is for sure – this pair are ready to go places, with an inaugural headline show at The Social in London now under their belts. Count on hearing much more from them in the coming months.

IMOGEN BEBB

'Ursula' is out now via Bandcamp

THE VISUAL ART OF JOHN FOXX

John Foxx is well-known as the founder and frontman of Ultravox and as a revered solo musician in his own right. But he's also a distinctive visual artist who has worked extensively in photography, graphic art, collage and other media over the years. A beautiful new book, 'Electricity And Ghosts', details his extraordinary portfolio. He explains how it all started, discusses his primary influences and talks us through a few of his key pieces

WORDS: MAT SMITH

Taking a sip from a cup of coffee, John Foxx settles back into his chair and begins talking in a quiet, relaxed and measured tone.

"I went along to a gallery opening last night in London," he says. "Someone asked me about paintings and which ones I like. I said, 'I like blue ones'. I think they were expecting a very critical rundown."

His comment might sound naive but it belies an expansive knowledge and understanding of art, accumulated through formative years of study and decades of practice. Foxx's visual work, which he began before forming Tiger Lily (later Ultravox!) in 1974, was created in parallel with his solo and collaborative music and continues today. His music and art projects have often consciously intertwined with one another. Sometimes his art existed in its own separate domain, forming components of long-running series of interconnected works, or as commissioned pieces for ambitious, large-scale projects or book jackets.

These myriad facets have been collated in a striking new book, 'Electricity And Ghosts', a comprehensive survey of his output from art school through to the present day. It covers significant ground too, from sketches, collage, photography and sculpture to grand ideas whose execution would require a level of integrated cultural imagination that few governments would have the stomach – or the budget – for. His aesthetic is continually in motion, flicking seamlessly between the naturalistic, romantic and ultra-modernist, with one eye lovingly staring at the past and another searching incessantly for our collective near-futures.

"Truly, the most interesting thing for me about any art is the initial impact," says Foxx. "With a painting or an artwork, it's very simple, initially. It's really all about feelings and emotions. It just hits you, and then you can complicate it afterwards."

John Foxx didn't go to art school – but Dennis Leigh did. The Foxx name came later.

Leigh was born in 1948 in Chorley, an industrial town in Lancashire in North West England, close to the cities of Manchester and Liverpool. His mother worked in a mill, while his father was a miner who had seen active service in the Second World War.

"Chorley was like 'Coronation Street'," he reminisces. "The only options for work were factories or mines. That was it. There was nothing else."

As a child, his real passion was drawing, a skill which would ultimately allow him to avoid following his parents into the town's dominant industries. Drawing seemed to come naturally to the young Leigh, and he would sketch constantly. As his skills flourished, he started to develop an interest in Atlas Comics (later to become Marvel) and their artist Jack Kirby. Kirby's influence on the comic form cannot be understated, and in the 1960s he was involved in the co-creation of characters from the Avengers to the X-Men.

"I loved his work," says Foxx. "He was one of a few comic artists that I got into. You learn a lot of shorthand drawing from comics – they're really where figurative art went to when it was outlawed by the art world. And it's almost axiomatic – comics became sophisticated at the very time that abstraction was dominating. They really bloomed and blossomed, and I found it all very satisfying. Jack Kirby has now been recognised as a major American artist. He was as good as any pop artist, but he was doing pop art before pop art was invented."

While at high school, Leigh found himself in art classes run by teacher Marie Ashworth, one of many figures to have had a material impact on the path that his life and career took.

"She was fabulous," he remembers, fondly. "We were rough kids in a rough secondary modern school, so she was very surprised and grateful that I could draw. It was Mrs Ashworth who fixed up an interview with art school when I was 16. I was very lucky to be taught by someone who was interested enough to bother. I look back now and everything would be totally different without her. Going to art school completely changed my life."

Leigh enrolled at the Harris School of Art in Preston, a beautiful, stately building completed in 1849 that overlooked the town's bucolic Avenham Park.

"It was great," he gushes. "It was another world – completely different from Chorley. I was suddenly in this quite grand place, but it was very relaxed and great fun, with a lot of other people up for a bit of adventure. You could make your own world. In fact, you were expected to do that."

Art school afforded Leigh and his fellow students a significant amount of freedom to make their own world. He talks about learning as much from the other students as he did from his lecturers. But one teacher Leigh did gravitate to was George Hollingworth, another key figure who, rather like Marie Ashworth, had a pivotal shaping influence on his receptive and inquisitive mind. Hollingworth was well-known for the series of weekly creative projects that he'd set the students.

"George was a great guy," recalls Foxx. "Those projects were all to do with understanding visual language. He'd say things like, 'Invent a new creature, but nothing corny, nothing comic, nothing horror – it's got to be feasible'. So he'd set rules, and those briefs were always quite strict. You'd feel like you didn't have much room to move, but then you'd actually realise that those limitations were really valuable. They propel you and help focus your understanding."

This was the mid-1960s, and Leigh was unquestionably a hippy. Long hair, the works. He'd attended the 14 Hour Technicolor Dream event at London's Alexandra Palace on 29 April 1967, where John Lennon was in the audience. Ultimately, it was Hollingworth who coerced Leigh out of his quest for the hippy counterculture dream.

"I remember telling George about a 'happening' that was taking place in Bolton," says Foxx. "You were invited to take some visual stuff along for projection, as well as some music. George said, 'What are you going to do?'. And I said, 'Well, I'm planning to take some Ravi Shankar records and some oily slides to project'. It was going to be very psychedelic. I thought it would have been great. That was all very new then, in 1967 and 1968."

Hollingworth was unimpressed. His alternative suggestion would have a profound impact on Leigh.

"He said everyone else would be doing the same thing," remembers Foxx. "I asked him what he'd do instead. He said, 'Well, you get your hair cut, short back and sides. You get a grey suit. You project the numbers one to 10 in Swiss typography, and play 'The Well-Tempered Clavier' by Glenn Gould. And you all walk in together, sit down, the projection counts one to 10, you play Glenn Gould, then stand up and walk out'. And that's what we did. Everyone hated it. And he was completely right – everyone else did have oily slides.

"George was great at style. He told me that every revolutionary group always looks the same. They all conform. He felt that it was easy to disrupt that – you join them, and then you just do the opposite. It's what became Situationism, which is what Malcolm McLaren did with the Sex Pistols."

Dennis Leigh went to art school. John Foxx graduated. After the Harris School and a year-long scholarship in Manchester, Leigh moved to London to study at the Royal College of Art. While there, he formed Tiger Lily, the band that would soon after become Ultravox!.

"The band was an art project," he says. "I remember Richard Guyatt, one of the lecturers, giving a talk about 'design for the real world'. And I thought, 'Wow, that's a great idea'. Guyatt wasn't interested in works that were hung on gallery walls or which were seen as rarefied. He was interested in making things become part of the real world, not as art."

The only rule was that the project had to be drawn from real life. Guyatt suggested it should be based on a subject the student knew well and loved, and the budding young artists should use it as inspiration to create something. Leigh chose music.

"I knew a little bit about bands," he says. "I grew up between Manchester and Liverpool in the 1960s, when there was a band on every corner. I thought about designing a group, because I'd always wanted to be in one, and I was already writing songs. I told Richard that I wanted to design a band and he replied, 'Alright – go ahead'. And that was it. That was my project. Simple as that. I put an ad in Melody Maker and started holding auditions."

Music had always been there for Leigh. His interest in bands had developed alongside his love of drawing, so it was almost inevitable that the two would at some point become fully meshed. He had learned to play guitar from an early age, receiving lessons every so often from Robin Ainscough, a neighbour on the next street, and another figure who had a massive influence on his life. He recalls learning to play 'Hey, That's No Way To Say Goodbye' by Leonard Cohen and The Beatles' 'A Day In The Life'.

"He knew his stuff," remembers Foxx. "He learned songs all the time. Every record that came out, he had it. I was very lucky to have mates like that. Those influences are vital. You get your inspiration from others, and you gravitate to people who you want to learn things from."

The auditions for his Royal College of Art project ultimately yielded a group of likeminded people. Violinist and keyboard player Billy Currie who, like Leigh, was from the north of England. Guitarist Stevie Shears, who was working in a paint factory in Dagenham at the time. Drummer Warren Cann, who had come over from Canada to join the English music invasion. And bassist Chris Allen – aka the recently departed Chris Cross – who'd picked up on early dub, ska and reggae close to the Broadwater estate in Tottenham, where he lived.

"It was my project, so I had to write the songs and determine the image for the band," says Foxx. "I had to figure out where we were going, which took a while. I knew it needed to be something to do with technology and art, ideally. The cyberpunk idea was floating around at that point, and I was really attracted to it because I was drawn to science fiction. I just thought, 'What's the *near*-future going to be like?'.

"That was the idea for the band. In science fiction, everything was clean and tidy, but I thought the group would be scruffy. It would be like Soho, but with androids. And there would be young hooligans or young people who were not part of anything. I was trying to imagine what London would be like in the not-too-distant future.

"There was such a lot in it. It took me a long time to sift it into shape. One of the primary influences was the New York Dolls because they were so trashy and great fun. Shortly after that I heard Neu! and a lot of the German bands, and that got me interested in technology. I liked the blues, but it was a little bit embarrassing singing about somewhere you've never been. I needed to create a version of the blues that wasn't American.

"I got rid of all the cliches and looked over to Europe. Having no cliches leaves you a bit naked. You had to listen to things that were not fashionable at a time when no one was interested, and then make it into something that works. It was a design project. That was the brief."

It was during the creation of the band that Dennis Leigh became John Foxx.

"I pinched the surname from Charlie Foxx," he says. "He was in a duo called Inez & Charlie Foxx, who'd supported The Rolling Stones when I saw them in Wigan in 1965. They were a bit like Ike & Tina Turner. He was a good-looking guy, and I remember he had a white sparkly suit on, in a very American cut. I was really impressed by them, and I thought his name was great, so I kept it."

We flick through the images in 'Electricity And Ghosts' together. It really does cover a diverse set of artistic ideas, but after a while you detect recurring motifs.

Collage is one. Like all of us, Foxx is a collage – of different influences, events and turning points. Even his adopted surname is part of his own personal collage.

"Nothing exists in a vacuum," he reminds me. "Whenever you do anything creative, it's always a collage. You pinch from the world. Originality is a complete myth. It's actually about lifting the best stuff available, putting it together beautifully and making something new. When you put together unexpected things that don't seem to fit, it triggers new associations.

"Making visual imagery and music is complex. They are just assemblages of things that have affected you, and you put your favourite bits together. They might seem disparate at first, but there are always connections."

The motif of a man in a suit is another recurring image in Foxx's work. It can be traced to George Hollingworth telling him to ditch the hippy clobber in favour of smart attire, Charlie Foxx's sharp threads and something far deeper.

"Suits were anti-fashion when I started wearing them, in the hippy period," he explains. "Then punk came along, and they were definitely *not* wearing suits. I liked that idea of being very against fashion. There's also a great thing about being anonymous. Suits give you a kind of invisibility."

A long-running idea in Foxx's art is the 'Quiet Man', a besuited individual navigating a world with no one else around. The images of the Quiet Man – usually Foxx himself – walking alone through authoritarian buildings or viewing landmarks normally thronged with tourists are unsettling but magical. They seem to underscore the aesthetic of Foxx the creator, making his own path through life, with only his choice of clothing suggesting a desire to fit in.

The final major repeated concept in his work is that of London, which most prominently appears in a series of images that envisage the capital covered in greenery, returning it once more to the wilderness that it replaced.

"I was talking about London to a friend last night," he says. "It's given me everything. I first came here with my dad when I was seven or eight years old. My dad would save up for about a year, then he'd drive us there. We'd stay for two weeks and explore, and he'd blow everything he'd saved.

"London became a fascinating place. He'd take me to Soho, where there were all kinds of things going on. I've got lots of memories of walking the streets with mum and dad – it's quite an emotionally charged place for me. Later, when the mod thing happened, I used to come down to buy Levi's in Whitechapel because they were incredibly rare things.

"So when I came here to attend the Royal College of Art, I felt right at home. It felt familiar, and there were just more possibilities. You realise London is a giant storehouse. It's a repository of everything for me, and I love it."

John Foxx's art and music seem so incontrovertibly linked that it's often best to see them as part of one set of ideas, expressed using different forms. What comes first for him – sound or vision?

"It really does vary," he says. "Sometimes you get a piece of equipment, switch it on and you hear a sound. It's so exciting that you get a song out of it – literally just like that. You know there's something going on when you get that excited.

"And then visually, you might watch a film or see a photograph, or even see something in the street, or a place – like an underpass – and it's so distinct and strange that you get ideas from it. And they're not always true ideas. You think, 'Who might live here?', 'What would it be like to be stuck here?', 'How would you exist if everything was like this?' or 'If you had a lover and you lost them in a place like that, how would you find them?'.

"All these stories emerge, and they're like little films. I often misread things in the newspaper because I'm half-asleep or watching TV at the same time. You think, 'What was that?', and realise you've made a mistake, but often, those kinds of mistake mean there's something going on in your unconscious mind that you haven't recognised yet. You're not consciously thinking about it until a news report or a sound opens up all these connections. And then it's a magnetic thing that draws other bits to it – images, stories, ideas. You just need to find the thing that's going to attract them."

He Walked For Years (Pages 32-33)
2008

"This is from the 'Quiet Man' series. That's my friend, the artist Jeremy Gardiner, in the grey suit, being the Quiet Man. I'd found the suit in an Oxfam shop. Whenever I wore it, I experienced a delight in being completely unnoticed – which was a great relief, since it was the opposite of being onstage.

"Initiating something like Ultravox enabled a great adventure for all of us and altered our lives for the better. I'm proud of all stages of it, because none of it could have happened without that initial invention. Leaving the band was a new phase, though – a relief and a challenge at the same time.

"It's fascinating how the unconscious works. For some time, mine was busy manifesting all the approaching circumstances into images of an abandoned, empty London, with only the Quiet Man – a sort of everyman – living there and exploring the place in his grey suit. Finding that suit in late 1977 had triggered a cascade of possibilities, images, stories and music. I'm always amazed and gratified by how such a simple event can produce so much. Over the following years, I asked friends who looked right to wear the suit in various locations. I'd take photos and use Super 8 film to realise the sort of world the Quiet Man might occupy.

"This particular location was in Genoa, in Italy. I took the photograph in the fantastically elaborate graveyard there. The avenue of statuary exists, but I've extended it and made it far longer. I thought again of this gigantic abandoned city that I was exploring as the Quiet Man, imperceptibly interleaved with other cities – even other countries. You could walk through it all forever.

"I wanted to make the scene monumental by upscaling the statues. Monumental architecture makes you feel small. You can't figure out whether it's meant to make you feel part of something huge and powerful, or reduce you to the size of an insect."

I Want To Be A Machine
1975

"This was one of the first collages I did for Ultravox, close to the earliest days of the band. It came from a recurring idea I had at the time, where I wanted to explore what it might feel like to become a machine. The only way I could illustrate that visually was by using torn-up fragments of a human face and machinery.

"The song itself was a bit more nuanced. It was written around 1974 and recorded in September 1976 – this was a couple of years before Kraftwerk released 'The Man-Machine'. Through both the collage and the song, I was trying to manifest what it might actually feel like to abandon all the emotions we have, even our physical form, as evolutionary baggage. I thought that's what might happen in the future, if we merged ourselves with electronics and bio-engineering.

"It was already becoming possible to glimpse the implications, through the increasing sophistication of heart transplants, pacemakers, replacement limbs and implants of various sorts, plus those deeply tragic and shocking experiments the Russians had perpetrated on dogs in the 1950s. Seeing just a few moments of that film on the news, it seemed like some fundamental line had been crossed. I found it all completely terrifying.

"When you have a stark realisation like that as a child, it's deeply destabilising. It's impossible to view the world in the same way again. You feel an urgent need to grasp all the consequences and possibilities just to survive, yet you also experience a profound longing for the world you've had to leave behind. Those things will alter you forever.

"So I felt compelled to ask, 'How would it all feel? And what might we lose or gain along the way?'. I even tried to live some of it out for a time, but that's quite another story."

I stole a cathode face from newscasts
I WANT TO BE A MACHINE
from the lakes beneath my tongue

Retro Future
2007

"This image was for the 'Retro Future' live album that I recorded with Louis Gordon in 1998. I thought it was a bit fairground somehow, a bit science fictiony, and slightly surrealist in the way it looked. That was the beginning of my interest in the phrase 'electricity and ghosts', and I was trying to make images to evoke that idea. This period is where the title of my book comes from.

"There's the person that's outside on a road. The American artist, Cindy Sherman, did a lovely photograph of herself by the side of the road in America in 1979 [as part of her 'Untitled Film Stills' work]. She's standing there with a suitcase – the road went around the corner and you can't see where it's going. It was the same kind of imagery. I find it really interesting because I didn't know about that picture.

"People can sometimes get to that point with an image and a style, completely independently, and without knowing anyone else is doing it. That was how it was with electronic music in England. Clearly, there were groups of people who were evolving similar things at the same time, and not knowing anything about what anyone else was doing."

The Grey Suit II (Page 42)
1980

"This came from the photography sessions that produced the 'Miles Away' single from 1980. Years and years before, I'd read an American magazine called Famous Monsters Of Filmland. In it, there was an image like this, of an empty suit with something dripping from the sleeve. And I just remembered it and looked to see if I could reproduce that feeling. So I got Herbie Yamaguchi, a Japanese photographer, to come over and take pictures of me. He was a great guy. We actually set it up in my living room. We got one of my suits, propped it up and just shot it. All very simple, but I was really happy with how it turned out – it's exactly what I wanted. In some ways it's fun, and in other ways quite sinister.

"It's playing around with visuals, and seeing what you can get from a common object like the suit. I wrote a story about a suit that had a life of its own, and that idea came from this image. It was about someone who is down on his luck. He goes into a pawn shop and finds a suit, puts it on, and it fits perfectly. It changes his entire life, because suddenly he feels confident. He makes a whole new life while wearing it. Then in the end, the suit's back in the wardrobe, so his wife takes it down to the pawn shop and it becomes someone else's life. The suit is alive."

Cinemascope (Page 43)
1998

"This was the idea of the Quiet Man walking into the unknown. I found this building in Leeds. I walked past it and thought, 'Wow, look at that'. Focusing on it from the point of view of the camera, it's really strange. It didn't make any conventional sense at all. I thought that made it perfect for the Quiet Man to walk into this type of situation. You don't know whether it's inhabited or not, and you don't know what purpose it has. It could be a government office, it could be anything. It has an authoritative feel, which is quite interesting... you don't know why he's walking into the building.

"This is me wearing the grey suit and portraying the Quiet Man. For this image I got my girlfriend at the time to take the photo as I walked across the plaza."

Lost Marilyn Molecule
2011

"Theo Travis and I did these instrumentals together for an album called 'Torn Sunset'. Theo is a great sax player. One of the tracks was named 'Lost Marilyn Molecule', and that inspired this piece. It's two images put together – an atom and Marilyn Monroe standing on the subway grate in 'The Seven Year Itch' with her white dress blowing up from the sudden rush of air as a train goes by underneath.

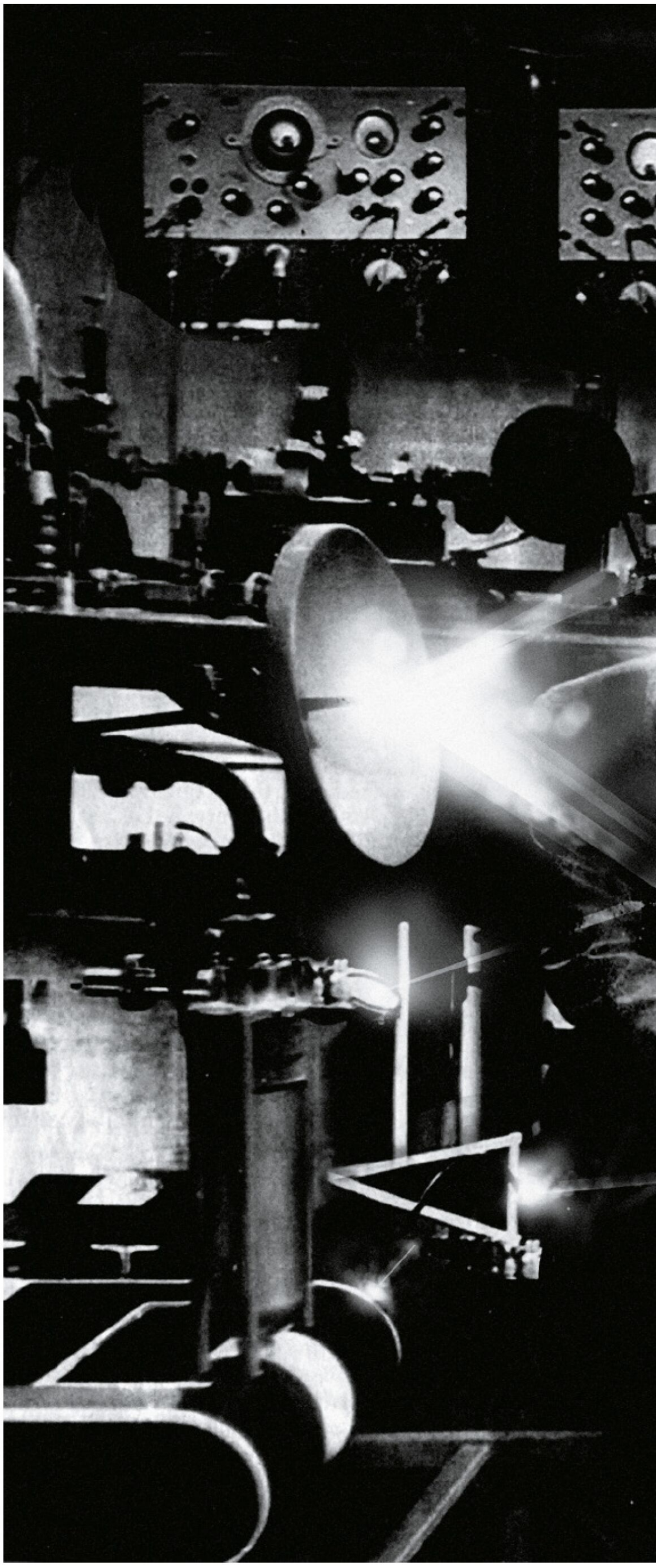
"The image was meant to feel like it was splitting apart. The pieces on 'Torn Sunset' are very dispersed – we were deliberately trying to see how far we could go with reverbs and spreading out the sounds while still making some kind of sense."

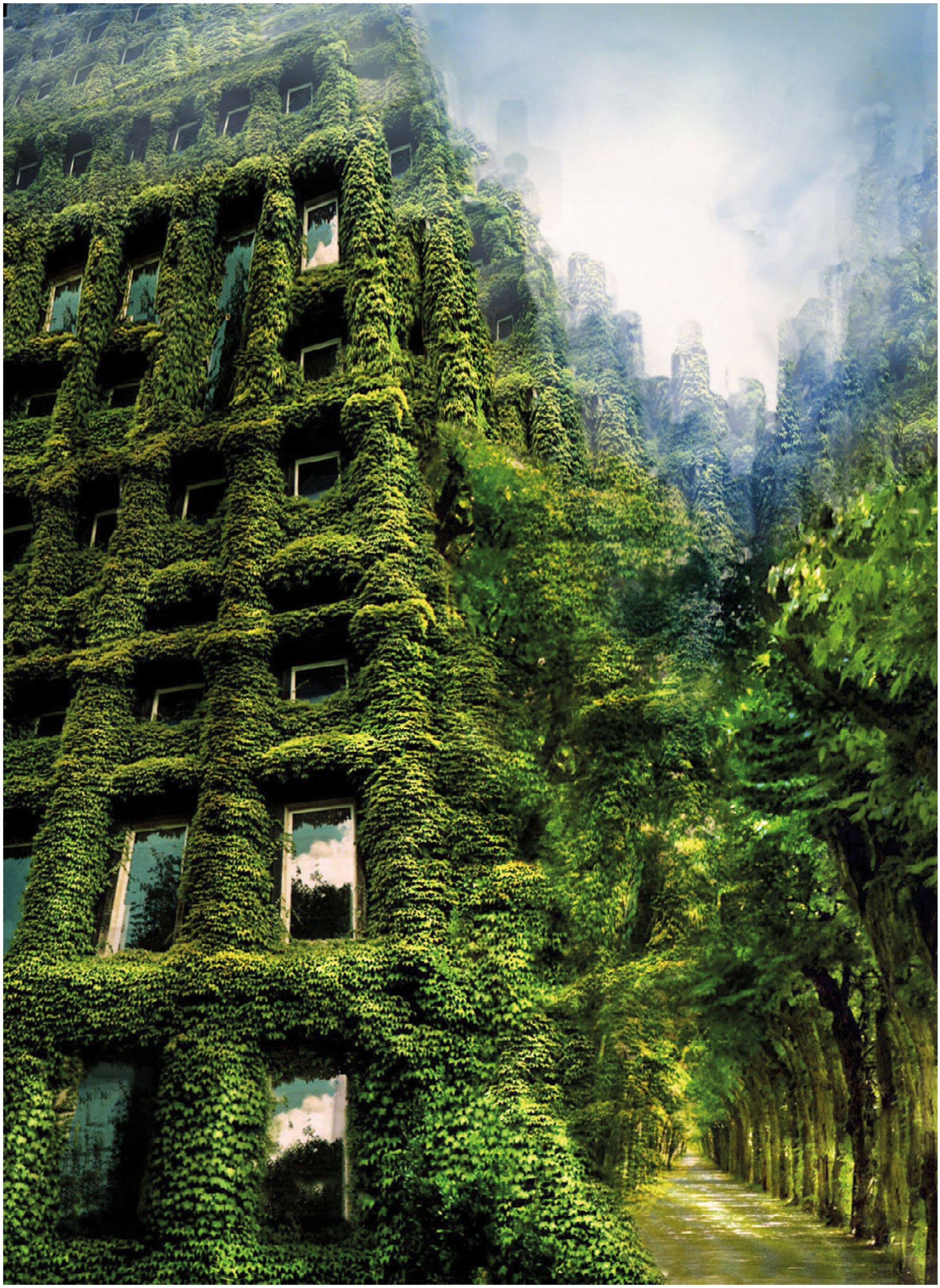
Neuro Video
2008

“This was the sleeve for the ‘Neuro Video’ live CD from 2008. Many of the tracks on it were from an album that Louis Gordon and I had worked on together the year before, called ‘Sideways’.

“Louis had just got married, and his wife kept on calling him during the ‘Sideways’ sessions, quite often as I was recording my vocals. So there was a bit of tension, and this inspired an image. It was an indirect joke about what was happening in the studio, and a reflection of what was going on at the time. I was trying to map the tension by showing the electricity flowing between the three faces.

“At that time, I was also continuing my interest in old film imagery, particularly early Eastmancolor movies such as ‘Forbidden Planet’, which I’d seen when it was first released. It’s a magnificent film – I wanted to live there, make a home in the red sand and order cola from Robby The Robot. The movie also carried one of the very first all-electronic scores and sound design by Bebe and Louis Barron. So, for me, warm, intense Technicolor and cold, intense electronic music were interconnected very early.”





Overgrown London

2012

"A friend of mine, David Litchfield, was a big influence on this image and the series it formed part of. In the early 1970s, he showed me a painting of a jungle. It was only after looking at it for a while that I realised it was the Centrepoint building at the end of Tottenham Court Road, completely overgrown. It was great but it really shocked me. I always say it had an equal shock effect to the first time you see the Statue of Liberty on its side in 'Planet Of The Apes'.

"There was this idea of greening cities and actually living in cities that have become green. And I thought it would be interesting to construct buildings out of living trees, rather than girders. Why not do that? That's what you can see in this image. I invented an organisation called The London Forestry Commission, which was entirely to do with the re-greening of London.

"The whole idea was to link up all the green squares in London, even Hampstead Heath and Hyde Park, with green corridors so that you can cycle around without any traffic. On the surface, you'd just have electric vehicles, bicycles and delivery robots, and then all the motor traffic would be put underground. It would make the whole place a lot nicer to live in. I think something like that will eventually happen.

"I also had an idea for the City Rivers Project, about the underground rivers in London. There are loads of them. I had this idea of glassing the pavements and then lighting the rivers so you can see them underneath. I think it'd be great to see a river going into the Thames rather than being completely buried."

21st Century: A Man, A Woman And A City
2016

"This one was used for the front cover of the '21st Century: A Man, A Woman And A City' album from 2016, with Louis Gordon. I really wanted to create a fragmented film scene. In some ways, it's like 'Systems Of Romance' illustrated, literally. You have this very old cinematic feeling but with a broken image. And it's huge, which is because the scale has been changed.

"I know exactly where the inspiration for this comes from. I grew up in Chorley, and the Odeon cinema there had this fabulous art deco staircase, winding round and round inside the building – it's been demolished now. It had a great foyer with a wonderful art deco sofa, which was rounded, made with chrome and covered in green velvet. The cinema had really luxurious carpets. And along the wall next to that wonderful staircase were movie star photographs from the 1940s. So when I made the collage and put it together, I realised that's where the inspiration had come from."

'Electricity And Ghosts: The Visual Art Of John Foxx' is published by Rocket 88 on 21 June

PHOTO: JACOB KHRIST

TO BOLDLY GO...

Detroit techno don, pioneering DJ and ardent futurist, Jeff Mills is electronic royalty. His latest mission, themed around black holes, is a breathtaking “cosmic opera” that’s quite possibly his most ambitious work to date

WORDS: KRIS NEEDS

One of Detroit techno’s few major originators to still be making high-profile waves, Jeff Mills has created what has to be electronic music’s largest body of work over the last four decades, with his albums alone running into three figures.

Relentlessly exploring uncharted realms within deep space or classic movies while active as the world’s most revered DJ, he remains the driven embodiment of techno’s original future mission as hatched by Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson nearly 40 years ago.

Starting with early 1980s radio broadcasts as “The Wizard”, then co-founding Underground Resistance with “Mad” Mike Banks before going solo and leaving Detroit in 1992, his explorations have imagined vintage sci-fi movie soundtracks, embraced classical adaptations and forged mind-blowing performance concepts that have taken him to the heart of the art establishment.

Jeff’s latest stage production and album, ‘The Trip – Enter The Black Hole’, is his most startlingly ambitious yet. Inspired by cult 1960s LSD movie ‘The Trip’ and Jimi Hendrix’s Band Of Gypsys, it predominantly imagines before and after entering that colossal space where gravity is so strong that not even light can escape. All this provides the gateway into a work of evocative complexity coated in electronic simplicity, compellingly enhanced by Japanese vocalist Jun Togawa.

The original incarnation of ‘The Trip’ was first performed at the Grand Palais during Art Paris in 2008 before visiting London, Tokyo and Australia. This new treatment, presented in Tokyo in April this year, expands lighting, projections, dancers and live performances into a 90-minute audiovisual spectacle in collaboration with multimedia artists Cosmic Lab.

Its soundtrack album towers like a natural progression in the ongoing trajectory that Jeff instigated with 1992’s ‘Discovers The Rings Of Saturn’ as X-102 with Mike Banks and Robert Hood. Speaking from his Miami home, he recalls the black hole concept initially coming from discussing its follow-up with Mike (before going in the opposite direction, recording 1993’s sub-oceanic classic ‘Atlantis’ as X-103).

“We were kicking around subjects that we could make into another album, and entering into a black hole was one of them, but we didn’t have that much information about black holes in 1992. The idea of ‘The Trip’ started from watching the 60s hippy movie. Of course, that was connected to LSD, but I was attracted to the psychedelic phase where he’s in another dimension. So it started from there.”

Directed by Roger Corman and written by Jack Nicholson, 'The Trip' starred Peter Fonda as a young ad director taking his first acid trip, landing in fantasy scenarios and different dimensions before emerging a changed man. It's all set against Electric Flag's psychedelic soundtrack – which pioneered the Moog synthesiser – and groundbreaking visual effects.

"I looked at that idea then expanded it with a much bigger, much wider context – not just in your mind but in the cosmos," explains Jeff. "Peter Fonda tripping and running around Los Angeles getting into trouble was applied to being in space, encountering something you would not expect that would lead you to a point where there's no turning back. You're not going to be the same person once that's happened.

"That film was released in an era where there was significant change, explaining how you could experience this change by taking drugs and having this out-of-body experience. I thought, 'That's an experience everybody would like to have' – legally, of course. Who wouldn't want to be able to transcend like that?

"The original 2008 production used this 'trip' idea, looking at science fiction in which the characters arrive at a point where there's no turning back and they can only go forward. So that was the beginning of the project."

Which is where singer Jun Togawa comes into the picture. In a career that started 45 years ago in new wave bands and acting, Jun has since become one of Japan's most influential avant-garde trailblazers.

"I had the idea that it might be more interesting if I could find someone to sing in a way that was like a narration, because it's a very complex subject," says Jeff. "We can't really see or travel to a black hole, so I thought that the human voice would connect the audience to it in a way that's different from everything else. Asking around if there were vocalists in Japan known for making complex subjects understandable to the listener led to Jun Togawa, until she was clearly the only person who could pull this off. She agreed immediately."

Like the space-related themes on Jeff Mills' many other albums, tackling black holes must have required some pretty thorough research, I venture.

"I'm not a scientist or an astrophysicist," he replies. "I take it as far as I can to convince myself that I know enough about the subject and the elements that build towards the idea to be able to compose music about it.

"I refrain from going too far because with a subject like this I have to use my imagination. If it's too much information it becomes too literal, too direct, and everything has a type of connection to something. That would drive me nuts, so I leave a lot of space to imagine and allow the music to approach certain subjects from a different kind of perspective."

When I ask whether Jeff's latest work felt like an ultimate peak, after the path opened up by his stellar interpretation of Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis' – the grandest science fiction film of the silent era and for many years to come – in 2000 and the 30-plus albums that have since followed, he discusses a totally unexpected aspect of both 'The Trip' and black holes.

"It's a big subject. It's the accumulation of a pathway – exploring and researching other subjects that convinced me I could even approach this subject with music.

"We did the performances in Tokyo, but I don't think I even scratched the surface of what this project could be about. You're talking about different types of reality. I'm not sure if that's connected to death or not, but we don't know what lies beyond the point where we expire and where we go.

"But there is that connection to it, so I'm using the subject to kind of speak for that. We're all going to expire and have the journey where there's no turning back. In a larger, more human context, that's really what this project is saying.

"The black hole is considered the ultimate void, but I never equated it with passing on. It's beyond electronic music or science fiction. I'm convinced that this subject is connected to every and any living thing that we've ever known and that we'll ever know. It should resonate with everyone.

"Unlike some other concepts I've released, I think this one is incredible storytelling. You're talking about if there's life beyond a certain point, imagining how it connects to ancient cultures, religion and life itself – why we get up in the morning and everything.

"I don't really come close to diving as far as I could probably go, but I think it's a good start."

JEFF MILLS

PHOTO: MASAKADO NISHIBAYASHI

PHOTO: MASAKADO NISHIBAYASHI

That said, the album's most jaw-dropping moment comes during the radio edit of 'Contradiction', with Jun to the fore until classic rock guitar riffs make a totally unexpected entry. The track began as a collaboration with Jun, who started in rock, and this got Jeff remembering the rock music he listened to during his 1970s adolescence.

"I'm still researching and exploring a bit of my past, when I was growing up in high school and listening to a lot of rock," he says. "I was into fusion jazz-rock by Return To Forever, bands like Rush, Led Zeppelin, all sorts of stuff. Of course, it all funnelled down into dance music eventually, but I still listen to rock.

"A few years ago, I started paying more attention to the last few months of Jimi Hendrix and what he was trying to do with the Band Of Gypsys. And I'm still very deeply into this – what Hendrix was trying to say and where he was trying to go with that, how he was trying to make the transition from the hippy era to something else completely different, and the sound of that music.

"This is where it actually comes from – to use electric guitar in such a funky way that it feels like something from electronic music, but actually it's another instrument that we don't use. That led me to listening to Bo Diddley, who used the rhythm guitar in a percussion type of way. I put this to Jun and she was into it because it connected to her music back in the 80s. So we went to it from there and her band's guitarist played the riff."

Not wishing to interrupt his flow, I don't let on that I'm having to restrain the lifelong Hendrix nut inside me from gushing like a fanboy. I've always believed Jimi was a master manipulator of this electronic battle weapon, but it doesn't count because it's a rock-associated instrument. The Band Of Gypsys was Jimi's (sadly short-lived) attempt to return to his R&B roots with an all-black band, represented by one live album that proved massively influential on Funkadelic and black rock.

Bo Diddley remains massively underrated as an electric rhythm machine, so it's testament to Jeff's open-minded skill that he can honour black music's roots in such a widescreen futuristic space concept as 'The Trip'.

What I do mention is interviewing Jeff with Mad Mike in early 1992 at New York's Limelight club, where Underground Resistance were making a rare live appearance at a bonkers rave night. I watched from the stage as, wearing masks and joined by MC Robert Hood, they hammered through tracks like 'Riot' before Jeff played one of the most devastating and astonishing DJ sets I've ever witnessed, cutting at lightning speed aboard an ever-growing mound of discarded vinyl.

Talking to the amiable UR pair before the show, they cited UR as "a project devised to cold-fuse DNA and cell structures with cybernetics and sonic circuitry – a union of sound, man and machine". Soon, Jeff would leave Detroit, taking that UR ethos to New York and other cities, unleashing solo releases on his Axis label and gaining his formidable DJ reputation. (Another memory is standing with his UK radio champion John Peel at 5am as Jeff slaughtered Tribal Gathering a few years on.)

"I've been able to just stay focused on the music and being a DJ travelling around, but I always considered DJing is for other people," reflects Jeff when asked about the dogged path he's followed that has always set him apart from his contemporaries.

"Making music is a very different type of process, where you create something from nothing. You're not taking existing music but bringing ideas to life, extracting ideas from dreams and things like that. I always took the art form of making music much more seriously."

He still speaks to Mad Mike, who told me a while ago that Jeff was still his "recon man".

"I speak to him quite often actually," says Jeff. "We've done so much together and are still very good friends. We don't make records together, but since I left in '92, we talk all the time – about the state of electronic music, about Detroit – and just kind of compare notes. I'm a musician, music is what I love, and as a DJ I never underestimate what good music can do. Maybe I've approached that with a bit more focus than some others."

Currently, Jeff lives between Miami and Paris, with studios in each city where he does all his recording.

"Here in Miami, it's a bit larger but still quite small and very tight, almost like a cockpit," he says. "It's a very simple space."

However, despite his forays into live jazz and classical concert interpretations, Jeff Mills signs off making a stand for electronic music.

"I'm more than convinced that when you get into subjects like space science, science fiction, fantasy and the beyond, it's electronic music that is ideal for that type of storytelling," he reasons. "That's where it really excels more than any other genre. In my opinion, it's what these machines are created for. I have no misconceptions – no mistake about that. I know what four oscillators can do and you can't replicate that in any other genre. It's just not the same."

'The Trip – Enter The Black Hole' is out now on Axis. More performances of 'The Trip' are in the pipeline (dates to be confirmed)

THE FORSYTH SAGA

Keeley Forsyth's latest offering is 'The Hollow', a bleakly beautiful and affecting symphony of operatic vocals and windswept soundscapes. Its inspirations? Scott Walker, a remarkable grandmother and an abandoned moorland mineshaft somewhere near Harrogate

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

"There's a photograph of the mineshaft on the back of the record," says Keeley Forsyth, taking a gentle glug of black coffee. "I was with Ross, the producer. We were in the middle of writing, and somehow the mineshaft just seemed to align with where we were at. It was very wet, and the dripping gave us a different sonic perspective.

"It made sense that we'd come out of the studio to have some time away from the record, then found ourselves in that place. We just came across it. I think we already had the album title, because I'd written the track, 'The Hollow', but it focused us a bit more."

Keeley glances pensively through the brasserie window and pauses for reflection. Dressed entirely in black, she cuts a striking figure among a gentle hubbub of Barbour-clad morning diners.

"I think a lot about the performative side of things," she continues. "I always go onstage wearing the same thing, like this, so any transformation is an internal one. And my thinking becomes all about the mouth, the throat, the blackness, the cavity. So rather than being in that mineshaft, I was trying to become it, really."

We're in Harrogate on a chilly Wednesday morning. Keeley has already apologised for suggesting that we meet in one of the town's more exclusive eateries ("I hope you don't think I'm pretentious – it's just that they do free coffee refills in here") and we have window seats and flaky pastries, basking in the pale sunshine while a steady stream of expensively dressed tourists mill casually on the pavement outside.

Away from her performances, Keeley Forsyth is the exact opposite of an abandoned mineshaft, which isn't a compliment I toss around lightly. She's chatty, funny, welcoming and warm. But the unforgiving Yorkshire landscape within 20 minutes' drive of this well-to-do little town has seeped like winter drizzle into the spine-freezing atmosphere of 'The Hollow'.

"Sorry," she chuckles, suddenly producing a handwritten note from her handbag. "I wrote the album title down in case I couldn't remember it."

It's her third album, following the success of 2020's 'Debris' and 2022's 'Limbs'. And it's terrific. Her operatic vocals sometimes initially feel wordless, but then meaning forms slowly, like gnarled trees emerging from impenetrable Pennine fog. Collaborating with producer Ross Downes, saxophonist Colin Stetson and jazz pianist Matthew Bourne, she has created a soundscape steeped in the wildness of the North of England – even though she winces at the prospect of being regionally pigeonholed in such an overt manner.

"It's weird," she explains. "When I was younger, I wanted to leave the North as soon as I could. And I did. I only ever saw myself in London. But there's something about the work I do as a singer that is *here*. I can feel it. It's cold. Before I vocalise anything, I put myself in this place, I put my hands down onto the earth to feel where I am. So it's funny how it's worked out – the place I'm from has become a source of material. You can't escape it."

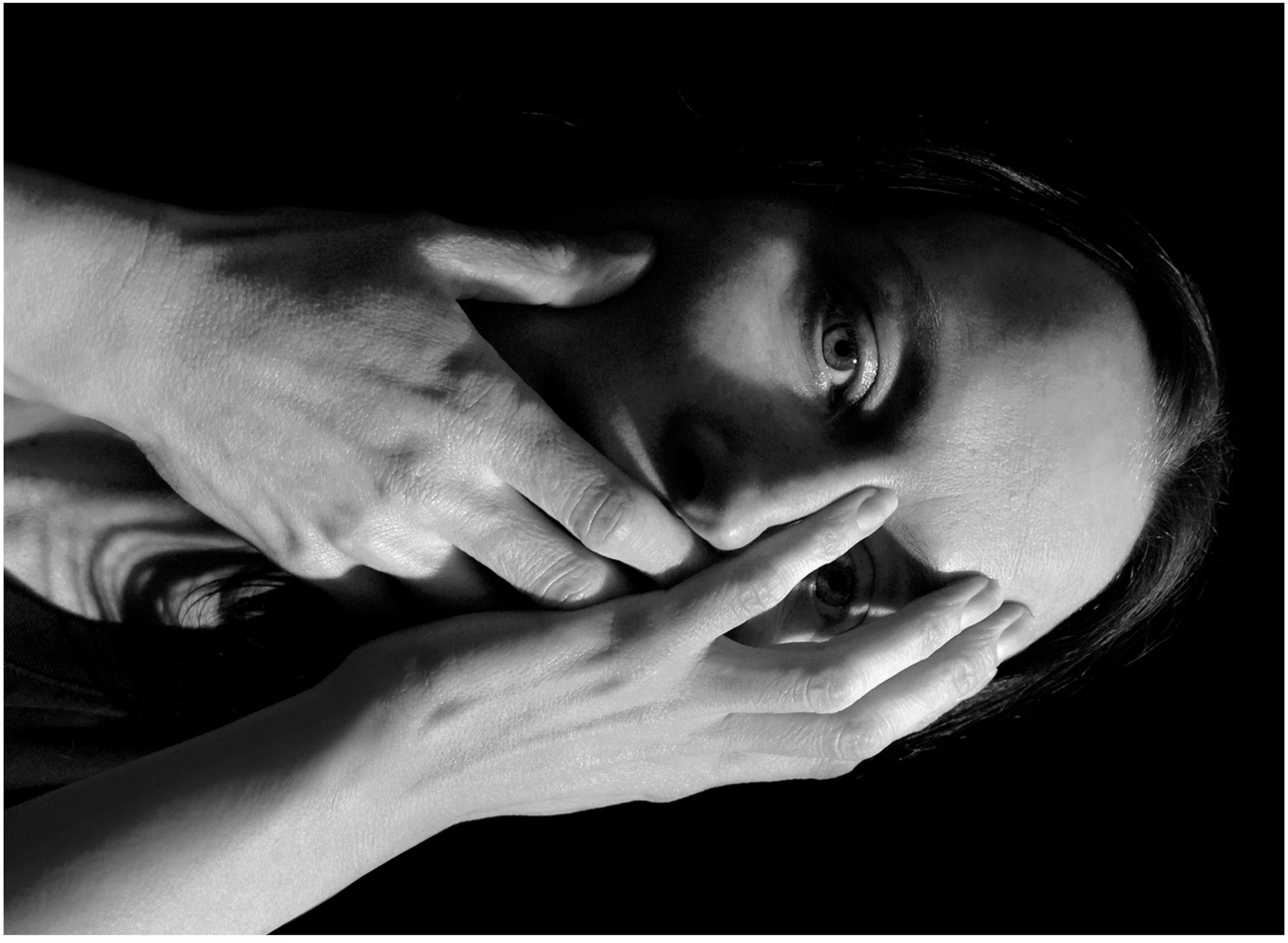
Home was originally Oldham, near Manchester, and her speaking voice still hums with a soft Lancashire burr. Harrogate has been her base for the best part of a decade now, and all her music has been made here, but 'The Hollow' has tangled roots on the other side of the Pennines. She was raised on a 1980s council estate by the doting grandmother the album is dedicated to.

"Mary," smiles Keeley. "I absolutely loved and adored her so much. She was a very normal, very straight northern woman who worked in the psychiatric ward at Oldham Hospital. She was there for most of her working life, and she worked until she was 80.

"I felt really fortunate as a kid, because we did things nobody else was doing. We'd go to all the museums and art galleries, and my gran and her partner took me to the theatre. It was just a wonderful life – and quite rare for the kids on our estate! And now I'm a parent myself, I know that kind of commitment is a real one. It's something you have to decide to do. I didn't take it for granted then, and now I appreciate it even more.

"Everything I do is dedicated to Mary. Everything. It's really strange to talk about it, but everything I think and everything I do is completely infused with her."

Mary died in early 2023, aged 86, and the lyrics of one song in particular feel like the depiction of an intensely personal moment. "The faint smell / Of hopelessness / Suspended by a hum / That seeps through the cracks," sings Keeley on 'Eve', as elegiac strings swell. "Let the body lay down and die."



"Yeah," she says. "When I'm performing that song, it's me re-enacting the last stages of being with her. Literally her last moments, singing into her ear and whispering to her to let go."

I've been there, I tell her. My dad died in September last year. In his bedroom at home, with me and my mum and my partner all holding his hand. We realised it was coming, and we sat in shifts with him for days on end, barely daring to pop to the kitchen for coffee and biscuits. It was exhausting and heart-wrenching, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I had to be there with him. And it changed me. Made me less scared of death, and – I think – perhaps a little more enthusiastic about life.

"It's absolutely life-changing," says Keeley, nodding. "In those final moments, I was just aware that we're kind of reduced – or elevated, whichever way you want to see it – to our senses. My gran's eyes were closed for a few hours, so we communicated through sound and touch."

There's a Hollywood version of death, isn't there? One profound final sentence, then "clunk". The eyes close and the head rolls to one side. But my dad's death wasn't like that at all. We spent hours at his bedside saying, "Has he gone? I think he's gone". And then, out of nowhere, he'd suddenly take another breath. When the final moment arrived, it took a while to be certain it had even actually happened.

"I know!" she exclaims. "Nobody tells you those things. I was really aware of this process taking over. There's a shutting down of the organs, so even the breathing towards the end isn't the breathing that you know. And it's something that really does change you. Just like giving birth changed me. It was good for me to see things for what they are. We're flesh, we're organs. So my gran gave me everything. Even in her last moments, she gave me the reminder that death is real. You do die, and it all stops."

She starts to chuckle.

"And I'm a person that needs deadlines like that, otherwise I'll just sit on my arse all day."

From an outsider's perspective, Keeley Forsyth has done precious little "sitting on her arse". By the late 1990s, as a result of grandmother Mary nudging her towards local theatre workshops, she was working full-time as an actor, starring in a slew of mainstream television shows. She has now enjoyed an impressive 25-year career as an in-demand TV performer. So had she always aspired to the life of an itinerant thespian?

"I hadn't really," she admits. "I grew up watching musicals and listening to opera. The spoken word was tricky for me – I wasn't really that interested in it. As I became an actor, I understood that it can evoke and provoke the same feelings. But I spent a long time struggling with the sense that it wasn't quite right for me."

Did she make a conscious decision to avoid being pulled into that celebrity world, then? It just feels like there's a 'Sliding Doors' moment here. One where, instead of becoming the baroque chanteuse of abandoned moorland mineshafts, she became a regular panellist on 'Loose Women', swapping witticisms with Jane McDonald.

Her acting credits are resolutely not small change – she's been in massive, prime-time hits, including 'Coronation Street', 'Casualty', 'Happy Valley' and 'Heartbeat'. She even spent a month caked in prosthetic make-up for 'Guardians Of The Galaxy'. And, more importantly, she's also done my beloved BBC daytime soap, 'Doctors'.

"A few times!" she laughs. "I've done them all. And I was really ungrateful when I was doing them. It was, 'Come on, there's got to be more than this'. Even when I was doing 'Doctors', I wanted to work with the likes of Yorgos [Lanthimos, Greek director] and I really enjoyed watching European cinema. But I don't think I ever got to the point where I was having to resist being pulled into anything. I was just desperately trying to work.

"I remember when 'Debris' came out, one journalist was trying to get their head around the fact that I'd done this regular, commercial TV work and then made an album that was all Nico and 'The Marble Index' – their words, by the way! And another journalist said that he wasn't going to listen to the record because it was being sold as 'actress makes music'."

Why, did he think it was going to be Robson & Jerome?

"Yes! And all that stuff is valid, of course. When you're doing something new, obviously you can decide to completely wipe the slate clean and not use your previous name, and I did think about doing that. But that would just have been creating more ghosts for myself.

"And I'm 45 now, I haven't got time to coast. I want to run on top of a hill, I want to fall, I want to scream, I want to tear my hair out. To an outsider, they might look like different choices, but this is the only way I can live."

Her musical passions were forged amid the deadpan eccentricity of a previous generation of wordy songsmiths. She admits to being "completely obsessed" with the ale-soaked drawing rooms of Yorkshire balladeer Jake Thackray and the dour, harmonium-drenched weirdness of Ivor Cutler. But the black, rolling heathland drones and the operatic vocals of her own work have one very obvious antecedent – Scott Walker. In particular, the sumptuous bleakness of his career-resurrecting 1995 album, 'Tilt'.

"When I'm making music, that's the only album I'll ever listen to," she explains. "That's the quest, to make something with that same feeling."

And what exactly is that feeling? She pauses for a very long time.

"Not human," she concludes. "Very primal. Take all of the information out, and you're left with the throb of some kind of organism. It's how Scott Walker makes the sounds as well – there's that famous clip of a side of meat being punched in the studio! I don't want to be overly pompous, but that's performative. It's Beckett."

So does this crunching change of career and artistic direction suggest some kind of epiphany? I'm cautious of broaching the subject because I'm aware that not everyone sees their personal issues as being fair game for a magazine interview, and I've heard Keeley talk before about a period of mental turmoil in 2017 that resulted in her being physically unable to speak. Her tongue simply wouldn't move. Which must have been terrifying for an artist whose versatile vocal expression is clearly a fundamental part of both her art and her everyday existence.

"It's true," she says. "I think that's what a psychological breakdown does to you. It locks you in. It lasted about two weeks. It was a physical manifestation of… oh, I don't know. But it was beyond scary. You're still conscious, but you can feel that you're too far gone. It was like going down into that mineshaft."

What happened? Did life, work and the sheer overwhelming gubbins of human existence just get on top of her?

"Yeah," she says, nodding. "I don't know how other people experience it, but I knew it was happening to me for a long time. But, if you're able to, if you can somehow survive, you can grab something from the bottom of the mineshaft and bring it back with you. And it becomes a very significant part of who you are."

And I'm guessing that "something" was the resolve to make the music she's making?

"Yes, I think so," she agrees. "What was there to lose? Sorry, it feels very indulgent talking about it."

Not at all, I say. I think it can be really helpful. There might be people reading this who are in a similar situation right now, perhaps also dealing with grief or depression, perhaps even despairing that their lives are a million miles away from eating breakfast pastries in a Harrogate brasserie and feeling hopeful and healthy and fulfilled in their work.

And yet, here we both are.

"Thank you," she says. "Weirdly, when I'm into an artist, I always try to find whether they have similar things going on – and usually they have. I just want to be well and I want to be happy. I am definitely where I'm meant to be now, and I can take everything that comes with that."

She takes one last sip of her refilled coffee, and we break open the final two croissants.

"And that feels really good."

'The Hollow' is out now on 130701

LIE DETECTOR

Typically direct and wickedly witty, almost nothing is off limits when speaking to John Grant. This time, he's discussing his opulent new album 'The Art Of The Lie', the evils of sugar – "its history is soaked in blood" – and the joy of "really good" sex

WORDS: SIÂN PATTENDEN
PICTURES: HÖRÐUR SVEINSSON

The first time that I meet John Grant is with a mutual friend in December 2023, after his show supporting Sleaford Mods at London's Alexandra Palace. Having given us both an enveloping bear hug, he launches into a conversation about dating apps and shows us a blurry picture on his phone of a man in headphones. He hopes to see him again.

"Will he still be wearing those headphones?" I ask.

"I hope so," he replies swiftly, with a glint in his eye.

John Grant is disarming. Frank, funny, vulnerable, yet huge like a tree. When he leaves, he gives us another of his mammoth bear hugs. But today, just a few months later, he is perplexed about the whole conversation.

"I can't remember saying that…" he muses over Zoom. He continues to think about it for a while, clearly concerned.

"Ah, I know who you're talking about. I just don't understand why I would have brought that dude up – I'm really sorry that you had to experience that. I mean, it was a great experience for me, but I can't imagine why I was talking about him. That was years ago – although it was memorable, I'll tell you that.

"Anyway," he sighs. "It's what made me realise you could have really, really good sex in your 50s."

John Grant is lying on the sofa in his living room, while the snow falls outside. Currently in Reykjavík, he is supine below film posters for Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 'Veronika Voss' and 'Xanadu' with Olivia Newton-John.

He has just released 'The Art Of The Lie', his sixth studio album. If you took all of Grant's output, multiplied it by a hundred and poured it into a film projector as if it were celluloid, you would have the soundtrack for a strange, rich, artful and devastatingly beautiful film – one that has yet to be made.

'The Art Of The Lie' is the absolute essence of John Grant. The lyrics are sharp, the music textured and dense, and the sentiments spot-on. A soundtrack to the world falling apart, which one could argue it always is, but maybe not on this scale. From religion and authoritarian hypocrisy to love and loss, family and dysfunction, Grant has set his sights big.

"Thank you – I think that's a beautiful way to put it," he says. "I'm continuing to grow and find my voice – which is tough when you love Joan Armatrading as much as you love Kraftwerk.

"I wanted the album to sound like John Carpenter, if he were to join the Carpenters. But I also wanted it to sound like Vangelis together with Dead Can Dance. And there's some Jean-Michel Jarre in there – 'Zoolook' from 1984 is one of my favourite albums."

Not only this, but there's also the trademark John Grant brain-disco of songs like 'It's A Bitch', matching the solid intellectual funk of opening track 'All That School For Nothing'.

"A formative experience for me was hearing Grandmaster Flash's 'The Message', which is one of the greatest pieces of music ever created in all galaxies, in all possible dimensions. It just makes me so happy every time I hear it. So that was the inspiration."

We're talking funk here, quite clearly, but of course it's skewed. With John Grant you get John Grant lyrics. 'All That School For Nothing' includes the line, "It takes Olympic-level intestinal fortitude / To watch what you are doing to your food". Where does that come from? I'm imagining all these quips and bon mots in some folder, and then you bring them to the music.

"That's a good description – I mean, it's not rocket science, is it?" says Grant, sitting up straighter now. "I'm writing things down all the time. With that song, I was trying to write something for Grace Jones. Or rather, I'd been asked to write a song for Blondie and I gave them 'All That School For Nothing'. Then I thought it would sound really good to hear Grace Jones in her 'Private Life' delivery saying, 'I lost my patience several decades ago / Around the time I was in utero'."

That would have been amazing. What happened?

"I never sent it to Grace. Damn."

Why not?

"You know, Blondie didn't want it and I didn't have any connection to Grace originally. But then all of a sudden I was playing ping-pong with her in her living room because I was making this album with [producer] Ivor Guest."

What do you say to Grace Jones over ping-pong?

"Well, when you win a point, you say, 'Oh, I'm sorry'. You apologise to her."

Is she a good player?

"She's very good, yeah. She's an absolute card-carrying badass, that woman – just so much energy and full of life. Pretty fabulous, I have to say."

Guest and Grant met in London in 2022, while Guest was working on Grace Jones' Meltdown Festival.

"He didn't know who the fuck I was," says Grant.

They spoke, however, and because Guest had produced Grace Jones, Brigitte Fontaine and some "incredible pieces of work", they exchanged numbers. Over the next couple of months they talked music and found out they "had a lot in common". Guest agreed to produce his next album.

An obvious early highlight on 'The Art Of The Lie' is 'Marbles'. Like Ultravox crossed with Sarah Brightman circa 'I Lost My Heart To A Starship Trooper', the song is all layering and dry ice – if dry ice were a sound.

"I wanted 'Marbles' to be super-creamy, you know?" he says. "It's got that incredible guitar solo from Dave Okumu which almost sounds like Bauhaus – that sound is buried in my DNA somewhere. It started out with that beat, which comes directly from Nina Hagen's 'Antiworld'."

Grant sings, "You deactivate my defence mechanisms / I think I'm coming unglued… I cannot brandish my trademark / Aloof cynicism," before ending with "I love you" over and over, which is extraordinarily powerful. It makes me cry.

"The song is about obsession when love goes wrong," Grant explains in his dulcet tones. "And it gets quite ugly at the end because it's succumbing to the obsession, uttering these words over and over, which then basically mean nothing because they're overused."

Really? I felt the opposite…

"For me, it was about the inability to actually experience love because of obsession. A human being cannot survive under the weight of that. I think the French would be able to sing a tune about obsession and love being one and the same, but it's not sustainable. Nobody is worth obsessing over."

How many times have you actually been in love?

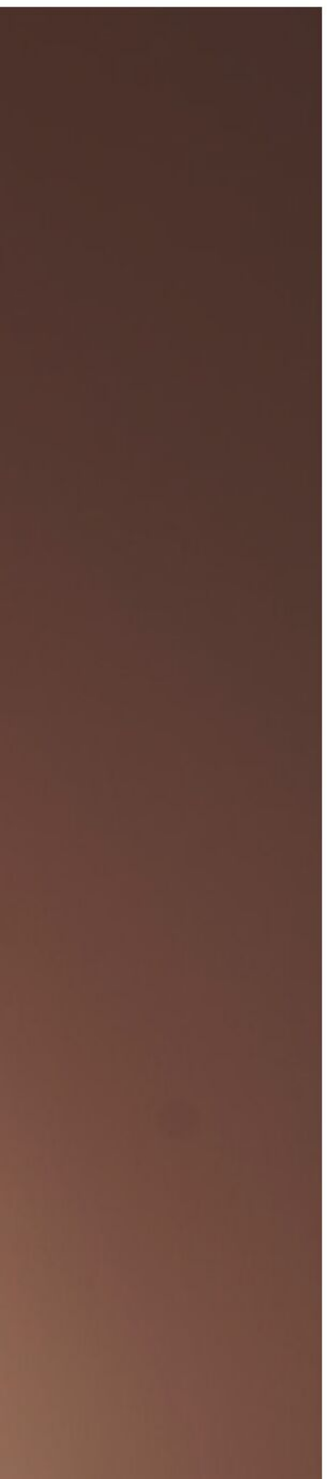
"I've fallen in love at the drop of a hat. I've been in love 10,000 times but only had one relationship that felt like the real thing."

The John Grant themes of family and upbringing feature on three songs – 'Father', 'Daddy', and 'Mother And Son' which is based on a true story about a sailor called Allen R Schindler Jr, who died in 1992.

"He was in the American Navy and was murdered by two of his co-sailors because they found out he was gay," says Grant. "I just wondered what it must be like for a mother to bring this little baby into the world, watch him grow into a man who has dreams of going out and fighting for his country, and then he's cornered in a public bathroom and murdered.

"His head is stomped on until it is smashed like a tomato and completely unrecognisable – and then they send the body back to his mother in that state and try and cover it up. That's the exact definition of a fucking nightmare."

'Father' details a chance visit to Grant's childhood home when the residents were moving out and left the doors open.



"I'm thinking of this prism of religion and patriotism through which I have been judged my whole life," he says. "I was suicidal when I was young. Being gay was the worst thing that could happen because it meant there would be no place for you in society. You'd be separated from your family and from the creator of the universe. It was a huge fucking deal for me."

Grant also talks about Trump and the massive shift within Christianity among the right wing in America, from the moral majority to the amorality of popularism.

"You're realising that all these Christians didn't even believe any of that shit because they're pledging their allegiance to this fucking charlatan," he says. "So in some ways I'm saying to my father, 'This was all just a big lie'. And I really thought about taking my own life because of all this shit."

And don't get him started on the sugar industry. Grant claims that 'The Child Catcher' is about what he thinks is an international scandal at the hands of big business, with references to "alabaster demon" and "blood-soaked pathogen". As he talks, he suddenly becomes quite Gwyneth Paltrow about the evils of addiction, "fake energy" and marketing to children. I am surprised. He notices.

"I can see you sitting there, looking like you think that I'm out of my fucking mind talking about this," he says. "But the history of sugar is also soaked in blood. It's all about slavery in the colonies."

Do you eschew sugar entirely?

"Oh, I mean, I'm a total fucking addict," he says, laughing. "I go back and forth, but there's the vanity – I don't want to be a fat cunt, either. My mother lost all her teeth when she was 19. She got a full set of dentures. Sugar is in *everything* – the fucking bread, the ketchup and all sorts of shit that it doesn't need to be in. And because it's a trillion-dollar industry, it's associated with Big Pharma too."

There's a lot of anger hidden within the beautiful, sumptuous soundscape of 'The Art Of The Lie'. Do you find yourself getting angrier than ever?

"In some ways. But maybe all this stuff is secondary because 'The Art Of The Lie' is also 'how do I wield that against myself?'. I'm basically somebody who is crumbling under the weight of all this shit. How do you live as an individual? How do you not let the anger get to you and focus on the shit that you *can* do something about?

"I'm sitting here talking about the sugar industry, but I should probably just be cleaning my toilet because that needs to get done too. You can't really allow yourself to get too angry about the world because the world doesn't give a fuck."

We move on. Where does Grant hang out, so to speak? Say I'm in Reykjavík tonight. Where do I go?

"There are all sorts of bars and great restaurants, but actually I haven't been out in ages," he admits. "As a sober person, I find it difficult to be around very drunk people. The drinking is insane here – people go absolutely nuts. If there is really good music I can go out and dance all evening, but Scandinavian intoxication is on a level with Russian intoxication and that's really saying something."

If John Grant didn't exist, would we have to invent you?

"Ha, ha! Um, no. I don't think you would even notice I wasn't there. People don't want to be reminded of the truth of everyday life – they want to fucking party and get fucked up.

"It took me a really long time to get here," he continues. "My music career was a very painful birth… it happened in fits and starts, and very slowly, with crushing self-doubt 24/7. It took a while to be able to express myself because I was so ashamed of who I was. I couldn't even go to the toilet without feeling self-conscious."

We talk more. It turns out that Grant also reads self-help books. His favourite is 'Feeling Good' by David Burns.

"A Russian friend recommended it to me, and I was like, 'You fucking cunt – you're going to recommend that I read a book called 'Feeling Good'? It does sound awful, but it's incredible."

Before we wind up, Grant takes me through his record collection, revealing his latest purchases and favourites. Tomita, Nitzer Ebb, A Certain Ratio, Front 242, Emmylou Harris, Throbbing Gristle, Wolfgang Press, Cabaret Voltaire, Devo and maybe a hundred more. This man buys a lot of vinyl.

So as this is for Electronic Sound, what's your all-time favourite synthesiser?

"It has to be the Oberheim OB-8," he shoots back. "That's a behemoth. A beast. That thing will destroy the foundations of your house, which is what I love about it. I also feel quite weak at the knees about the bass sounds that are produced by the ARP 2600."

Also on his list are various modular synths – the "incredible" Moog 3C, the ARP 2500 and a Serge, which is "from California and makes very, very squelchy noises".

"I have a modest collection of synths," he says. "A meagre 18 to 20 at my studio."

That sounds like a lot.

"It's too much," he claims. "I need to get a T-shirt that says, 'I promise I'll never buy another synth', but I just can't make that promise."

Aren't you allowed? Most people would be allowed to buy another synth if they make music that uses… synthesisers.

"Well, I'll tell you this," he adds. "Whether I'm allowed or not, I'm gonna fucking do it."

'The Art Of The Lie' is out now on Bella Union

IN THE FRAME

PHOTO: MIKE WOLFF DER TAGESSPIEGEL

Not only is Wolfgang Tillmans an award-winning photographer, he's a pretty nifty electronic artist too, as his expansive second album 'Build From Here' – all pulsing synths, lush instrumentals, wistful ballads and clubby peaks – so ably attests

WORDS: CLAIRE FRANCIS

It's difficult to imagine Wolfgang Tillmans as anything less than a creative prodigy. This is, after all, a man regarded as one of the world's most prominent living artists. The German photographer's career spans nearly four decades and is studded with accolades. His work has been displayed in leading galleries and museums, he was the first non-British recipient of the Turner Prize, and last year he made Time Magazine's "100 Most Influential People" list. A case of innate artistic genius, then? Not so, as it turns out.

"I wasn't the talented kid in art class," he says. "And I never learned to play an instrument. People didn't project any expectations regarding music or art onto me, and that allowed me to completely formulate my own ideas of what I wanted to do. In hindsight, I was lucky, because it happened in combination with me wanting quite strongly to do these things. I didn't give up because people thought, 'Maybe you're not so talented', on first glance."

He's speaking from his home in Berlin, and the point he makes about looking beyond first appearances to see true value or beauty might well apply to his overall creative practice. Tillmans is perhaps best known for his photographs of 1990s youth culture, which captured the acid house boom, free rave scenes and queer lifestyles with joy, sensitivity and openness.

His career has always run in close parallel to music and club culture. Although he first began making music in 1986 as part of a synth duo in his Rhineland hometown, it was not until 2021 that he released his debut album 'Moon In Earthlight'. Artfully crafted, it's both ruminant and playful, combining his processed vocals with electronics, field recordings and jam sessions.

With 'Build From Here', he's making a bolder, more expansive statement. From vibrant synthpop and propulsive motorik rhythms, to contemplative electro-ballads and ecstatic club bangers, it's Tillmans' idiosyncratic voice that draws everything together.

Distinctive in its free movement, from wavering to robust, his vulnerability invites a feeling of common ground. You sense it's not by accident that Tillmans' band, who appear on the track 'Grüne Linien', bear the name Fragile.

"I have often observed that people who want to look strong or project strength are usually overcompensating," he says, drawing thoughtfully on a cigarette. "I have always somehow embraced my own fragility as a human. There was maybe a spiritual side that came with me, due to my interest in astronomy and facing my own smallness in the vastness of the universe. It's pointless to resist an understanding of myself as fundamentally fragile. And that's what we all share with each other. We can only really build strength from that understanding of one's own fragility."

For many years now, Tillmans has divided his time between Berlin and London. Although he grew up an hour's drive away from Cologne and Düsseldorf, cities he describes as "hotbeds of avant-garde music in the 1950s, 60s and 70s", he remembers feeling a real connection to the UK's burgeoning new romantic movement.

"I came to the UK as a student during the late 1980s, and then moved to Bournemouth in 1990. I feel very grateful that I came of age in this golden moment of early 80s pop music. All that experimentation had become possible through the democratisation of electronic gear.

"For me, what was so special were the 'gender-bender' artists like Boy George, Haysi Fantayzee, George Michael and Culture Club – none of them were out as gay," he explains. "They all had straight personalities or presented as straight. But they were completely playing with it, wearing make-up. It was all considered stylish, not outright deviant!

"And so, for me to grow up in an industrial town, and then to be there and have all these role models on things like 'Top Of The Pops', was just incredibly encouraging. Because imagine, you know, in other decades, there were absolutely zero role models for that kind of expressiveness.

"It had somehow been allowed to live under this idea of flamboyance, or the English humour, and I felt that there was a compatibility. Because I like absurdity and slightly demented humour [laughs], I always felt drawn to the UK, and London in particular."

In Germany, it was the emergence of the new wave and post-punk infused Neue Deutsche Welle that sparked his enthusiasm for home-grown music.

"When I was younger, the older electronic music like Can or Tangerine Dream, was considered very suspicious. It was not really 'handmade' and so was regarded as cold and lazy, rather than cool. Singing in German was always thought of as uncool. For a time, it was all English and American acts. Then suddenly there were pop bands on the chart shows singing in German, like Nena's '99 Luftballons' and Trio's 'Da Da Da'."

That pure pop perfection struck a chord and has certainly seeped into Tillmans' own songwriting. Take the exultant synthpop of 'Insanely Alive', from 'Moon In Earthlight' – a track that Pet Shop Boys remixed in 2022.

"I don't know if it sounds corny, but I find that melodies and lyrics literally just come into my mind. It's something I rarely labour over. They literally pop up and then they're there, which is an incredible thing."

And speaking of 'Moon In Earthlight', we find ourselves coming back to Tillmans' affinity with astronomy. What exactly is it about the cosmos that he finds so profound?

PHOTO: MUSTAFAH ABDULAZIZ

"Well, it's definitely not an astrological interest," he says, laughing. "Astrology is mainly a benign thing. But I just find it so self-centred to think the universe cares about you. And that, even if it did care about you, it would be readable for you in the specificity of a horoscope.

"The same goes for religion, of course. I find humans who tell us what God thinks, word by word, to be incredibly immodest. If you're truly spiritual, then you have to first and foremost be open to embrace and somehow make peace with what you don't know, because there's no other choice. Everything else is just witchcraft or magic."

So does he ultimately believe that the universe is indifferent to us?

"I mean, it has to be, as far as the evidence suggests. And yet, on the other hand, I do believe in certain humanist values, because they are better for us. Collaboration is better for us than competition and hostility.

"I believe that if people had a better understanding of the mechanics of the solar system and the universe – our journey around the sun in 12 months and the rhythm of the moon – they would feel more at home in this world. They would see how these things work and that they are not threatening."

The title 'Moon In Earthlight', he explains, is a reference to the "Earth shine" or "Earth light" that would be visible from the dark parts of the moon. In the moon's night sky, a bright Earth is shining.

"I find it comfortable," he says with a smile. "The thought of seeing the young moon in a Western sky on an afternoon, when it's a slim crescent. What we see in these moments is our own light reflected onto the moon. I find these things humbling."

We're getting deep into the big picture stuff here, and Tillmans is a generous conversationalist. He lights another cigarette, and it's easy to picture yourself sitting with him in a smoky bar somewhere, musing over these ideas for hours.

"I must say, I like the second half of the interview much better," he says, as if reading my mind. "I feel more clear and fluid."

Still on our theme of philosophical enquiry, I suggest it's no coincidence that electronic music is often described as cosmic or otherworldly.

"Maybe that's why I love electronic music," he says. "It always has an energy that is beyond what I can fully comprehend. Where do these sounds really come from? The humming and unpredictability of acid house. The 303 being pushed to its limit.

"I also find that with photography. No two moments are really the same. So I do value the moment when I take a photograph. I'm not photographing things all the time. But when I have a heightened awareness that leads me to reach for the camera, then I know, 'I have to do this now'.

"The same goes with music. When there is a heightened awareness of being together, or me getting an idea, I do reach for the sound recorder – I record on the spot and also record jams. I feel that, almost in a photographic sense, you can't necessarily recreate the particular magic that appears in another take. To recognise when something is good, I have found to be as much a part of my work as the actual making of something."

That uncanny ability to capture the zeitgeist has always shone through in Wolfgang Tillmans' art and music. From his documentation of London's Pride and Berlin's legendary Love Parades to his long-running affiliation with the city's storied Berghain club (he is the only person to have been allowed to photograph inside it), his images represent scenes of both party and protest.

Earlier this year, Germany added Berlin's techno scene to the UNESCO cultural heritage list. He is optimistic about what this means for the city, but also quick to point out that his association with electronic music runs much deeper.

"People make the assumption that I'm very much involved in Berlin techno, when I was just as much involved in the London scene. I also have connections in New York, where I exhibited and lived for a time in the 90s. I was fortunate enough to go to Detroit and visit Richie Hawtin in Windsor, Ontario, when he was still living with his parents.

"My perspective on electronic dance music has been very much informed by a transatlantic, pan-European thinking," he says. "Frankfurt was huge in the very early 90s. Acid house was pumping in Hamburg when I lived there in 1988 and 1989.

"Of course, I don't want to play down Berlin and what happened in this unique architectural municipal setting. An entire city of four million people had vast amounts of unused industrial space, with that paradigm shift of the end of the Cold War. It was a new orientation into the 1990s that fostered what we are still loving and living now."

With our time almost up, it feels apt to look to the album title, 'Build From Here'. It implies forward momentum, rather than a desire to focus on the past. Can nostalgia provide value in a creative context?

"Nostalgia is a deeply human emotion," Tillmans says. "I mean, one could interject here with 'speak for yourself'. I'm currently reading the writings of the philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti. He talks about living in the here and now and rejecting all sorts of nostalgia. So maybe nostalgia is also something that's trained and culturally particular to a Western state of mind.

"I find it useful and positive when it leads to a sense of, 'because it was possible, it should be possible again'. But we must also ask, why do we always think that the past was better?

"To be honest, that was really the primary reason for me to document the nightlife of the 90s. I felt I had a strong cultural awareness and that what I was experiencing there – the sense of community and music – was extremely rare. It didn't have precedents 80 years earlier or even 20 years earlier. And it was something that happened in few places on the planet.

"If we can hold on to that memory and remember that people resisted, took their liberties, expressed themselves and made these spaces, then it should encourage us to be hopeful. We should consider that now is also a place where freedom can be created."

'Build From Here' is out now on Fragile

RAVE NEW WORLD

Fancy a spot of “mutant grime” and “deprivation chamber dub”? You do? Then Oxford producer Low End Activist is most definitely your man

WORDS: BEN WILLMOTT

“It’s like a love letter to my childhood,” says Jamie Russell (aka Low End Activist) of his new album, ‘Airdrop’.

It seems you can take the man out of Oxford – Russell is talking from his current home in Berlin – but you can’t take Oxford out of the man. When it comes to albums at least, he seems to turn to his origins in the often misunderstood city. His 2022 debut, ‘Hostile Utopia’, was about the ups and downs of growing up on the Blackbird Leys estate, which flipped Oxford’s genteel “university and ‘Morse’” image in the early 1990s when it turned into a place of mass carjacking and rioting.

‘Airdrop’, meanwhile, a concoction of familiar rave sounds recast in genre-defying contemporary shapes, turns to a quite different mythology that emerged from those same years at the start of the 90s – namely the raves and free parties that took place in the countryside surrounding his home city.

In the days before the Criminal Justice Act and travellers’ free events supercharged by younger ravers, the yawningly wide spaces between towns in the county were an ideal landscape for party sites at the time.

Most of the nine tracks on ‘Airdrop’ are named after events from the era, from ‘White Horse Hill’ and ‘Mayhem On Barton Hill’ to ‘Yarnton Road 2 Cassington’ and ‘Waterstock’, the last of which being the site of a 1992 rave – ironically named Mythology – that spawned a much-circulated tape of DJ SS in action. Cassettes are key to the concept – not for nothing is ‘Airdrop’ released on tape.

“I was too young to go to raves – I was still at school,” says Russell, who pieced together the connections between reports of parties with the rave tapes that were circulating at school. “I lived through it vicariously, partly through my dad. My mum and dad split up when I was quite young and Sunday was his day for looking after us.”

Often, he says, his dad and various friends would have been to a rave and the party would continue on Sundays.

“There were lots of raves going on in and around Oxford between 1991 and 1993,” he recalls, with previously untouched rural locations like Forest Hill and Cassington – the scene of regular massive Fantazia parties – suddenly becoming the destination for mythical underground gatherings.

“I was kind of aware of what was going on because I had tapes that said ‘DJ Ratty… Mythology’, and I knew that had happened at Cassington, so there was something in the air close by.

“I was 13 or 14, so my experience of that music was cassette tapes. A couple of friends at school used to share them around. It was the only way you could get hold of the music. There was a real mystique about it – you had to go to some serious lengths to get these recordings.”

In this pre-internet age, the young Russell would have to fill in the details with his own imagination.

“You could hear the crowd, you could hear everything,” he says. “I think that’s what was so important and sacred about those recordings – you could not ignore the fact it was pure joy and adulation going down. Which made it all the more difficult to listen to on a tape deck, sitting in your bedroom. I just wanted

to be there, man. It's no surprise that my future has ended up with me making music. That was my first hit and I've been chasing it ever since."

Although he'd missed the glory days of the raves, Russell was still in the right place at the right time when it came to the burgeoning dance music scene.

"There was still an undercurrent of something really good going on in Oxford," he remembers.

He's previously mentioned the sight of local lads and jungle/drum 'n' bass pioneers Total Science driving around his estate in newly acquired sports cars as inspiration and proof of a world beyond its boundaries. The city had a big skate scene – local store SS20 was run by DJ Lee, who ran the drum 'n' bass label Legends and the club night The Source with a DJ called Brillo. Then there was Massive Records.

"Massive Records was one of the biggest record shops in the UK," says Russell. "I remember going in as a teenager. I'd be there looking for a Daft Punk record and I'd see Sasha and Digweed buying vinyl. I saw Danny Tenaglia and Carl Cox too – people came from all over to go there."

From the age of 18, promoting his own house nights at the student pub The Bullingdon Arms, he's steadily carved a unique niche for himself with the Sneaker Social Club label and his own productions, both of which take inspiration from the sturdy, distinctive sounds of old skool rave – processed, spliced and reassembled in a very 21st century free-form style.

But although his sound is informed by jungle, dubstep, bass music and left-field ambience, it's a slave to none of them.

'Airdrop' is certainly a spectacular example of eschewing the shackles of genre. Shards of skittering junglist breaks shatter clouds of alternately woozy and foreboding ambient atmospherics, while foundation-shaking sub-bass rumbles threateningly underneath.

Occasionally, a disembodied voice or even just a clipped consonant from a long closed-down and forgotten pirate station will penetrate the soundscape, like an ancient memory suddenly coming to the fore.

At times, as with 'Tango Skit', it's beatless, dominated by a bassline that threatens to kick off but never actually does. 'White Horse Hill', meanwhile, is like listening to the cleverest edits from a drum 'n' bass don like Photek or Dillinja, stitched together after the conventional heart of the track has been hollowed out.

"I had a rule that there should be no rolling beats at all," he says. "And I pretty much stuck to it."

Namechecking DJs Tango & Ratty, Top Buzz, DJ SS, DJ Seduction and Dr S Gachet as heroes from that age, he says many of the adrenaline-rush trademarks of the time have remained central to his sound.

"A lot of my sound palette comes from that period of UK hardcore," concludes Russell. "Not so much the happy stuff, but when it got a bit darker. That sound can be sad, it can be fucking evil, but there's a sweet spot between the two and that's the music I like."

'Airdrop' is out now on Peak Oil

THE BEAD GENERATION

Touting a mutated brand of electrified yet introspective post-punk, the debut album by New York's Chanel Beads includes David Sylvian and The Blue Nile among its many influences. Yep, it's that good

WORDS: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

"As a kid, I was obsessed with the repeat button on CD players," begins Shane Lavers, the architect behind New York's Chanel Beads. "I'd have a favourite song on a record and would only listen to that. Sometimes I didn't even like the whole song, I just liked a part of it. I've been trying to reproduce that sensation in my own music, fixating on one little part before it's gone. I really just wanna make music that you want to start over once it's finished."

In these times of on-demand digitised dopamine hits, Lavers has the zeitgeist pinched firmly between his fingers. His unique collage of styles treads a delicate line between introspective post-punk, haunting indie, mellifluous avant-pop and ambient electronics – as moreish as a chart hit, but without the meaningless pap.

He's been putting out music for the best part of a decade, although the Minnesota native says that "things really picked up" after moving from Seattle to Brooklyn a few years ago. Following a number of EPs released to modest audiences on Bandcamp, his crystallising moment arguably came with the May 2023 single 'Ef', the kind of song that plants a flag in your heart with its earworm hooks and distinctive melodies.

Things have snowballed since. The Jagjaguwar label snapped him up at the end of last year, and then Mount Kimbie invited Chanel Beads to join them as support for the US leg of their worldwide tour. Now, as Lavers approaches his 30th birthday, he's celebrating the release of his acclaimed debut album and has already started on the next one. You have to wonder if he's even had time to take in the view…

"Honestly, I don't really know how I'm feeling," he says, somewhat tentatively. "I feel like I took a ton of time getting comfortable with releasing music, and I've been playing shows pretty regularly since I was 20 – almost 10 years. So it feels good to be ready. I feel focused on this new record."

Titled 'Your Day Will Come', the album represents another evolution in Lavers' idiosyncratically juxtapositional sound palette, where Auto-Tuned vocals rub up against detuned, angular guitars, and innocently poised harmonies glide over distressed, heavily processed samples. It's a world where lo-fi and hi-fi coexist. It also reaffirms the importance of Lavers' bandmates, guitarist and vocalist Maya McGrory and violinist Zachary Paul, whose fingerprints are all over the album.

"It would be a totally different thing without them, like a play with no set," he says. "Even if I have a whole song, they come in and add flourishes which, in terms of structuring and actually making these songs breathe, are just as important as the bones of them."

Lavers references "fake jazz", a term coined by Steely Dan's Donald Fagen to differentiate between a commercialised and polished rendition and its "real" counterpart, and how it inspired him to poke at the blurred edges of genre convention. It's also part of the reason Lavers opted to rest the entire album on an ornate bed of orchestral strings, all thanks to a free sample pack made by the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

"The idea seemed funny to me at first," he says. "Using this grand, expensive sound, which is actually a free plug-in, that I'm controlling with my QWERTY computer keyboard, while lying on my bed. The actual point, however, is that distinction no longer matters. Like, even though it's real, it's fake stuff recontextualised as real stuff. And the real stuff, which is Zachary's violin, is recontextualised as fake stuff.

"That was pretty well thought-out right from the beginning – to start from a dichotomy and then ideally get to a point where difference no longer matters once you listen to the song. My goal, always, is to make distinctions melt away."

The more time you spend in Lavers' company, the more you realise he is not simply a product of his time, but someone who has thought a lot about what it *means* to be a product of his time. In relation to that, he takes a particular interest in the impact modern technology is having on our collective psyche.

"Music is something that has existed as long as we have existed, but now it's almost like this private recorded experience rather than communal," he muses. "It's crazy that most of what we hear now is just being pumped straight into our ears and brain. That personal ownership is really fascinating to me, combined with the fact that listening to music in this way is one of my earliest memories of feeling like I'm my own person."

There's a discomfort which is central to Lavers' music. I tell him, as gracefully as I can, that the overwhelming feeling I get when listening to Chanel Beads is like he's wrestling with mundanity.

"I think mundanity – and futility – are both really important to my music," he says, nodding. "Now, more than ever, I'm compelled to act, but I'm also unable to meet it. I feel like there's nothing you can do to change it, and that was a huge feeling underwriting the album.

"Zach said it right when we were on tour, watching the first hospital getting bombed in Gaza, and then you just go to work. And I'm not trying to make a statement about what action means. I just think it's something a lot of people struggle with. I know *I* feel it. Not just about the external and global worlds, but about what's going on in yourself too."

So where does he see himself going next in these uncertain times?

"I just want to make another record really quickly," says Lavers matter-of-factly. "I'm actually pretty close, but I need to change up the environment that I do it in. Those same tools I know really well are all right here. I did what I wanted to do with them, so the next challenge is to use other stuff – switch the atmosphere and environment that I'm making music in."

'Your Day Will Come' is out now on Jagjaguwar

SHOW STOPPER

ACTRESS
Statik
SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND

Towards the end of his lengthy tenure at former home Ninja Tune, London producer Darren Cunningham (aka Actress) was becoming embroiled in ever more complex concepts and increasingly cosying up to the classical world.

He made a spectacular appearance for BBC Proms at The Tanks, the concrete gallery beneath Tate Modern, in which he he instructed the London Contemporary Orchestra to play their instruments in non-conventional ways. Then in 2019, he staged a performance of 'Mittwoch', part of Stockhausen's 29-hour opera cycle 'Licht', with the Netherlands Chamber Choir on hand to act as politicians debating the meaning of love.

Such antics, while certainly thought-provoking and media-worthy, were a long way removed from his roots DJing in a crowded box room above the Camberwell pub The Funky Monkey two decades before. While it would be an exaggeration to describe 'Statik', his 10th studio album, as a floorfiller, it's definitely a return to the relatively uncomplicated world of electronica.

Released on Oslo label Smalltown Supersound, 'Statik' was apparently completed with "an almost unnatural ease". Cunningham entered a self-described "extensive flow state", enjoying a new-found freedom. It sounds like it too – there's an instinctual, spontaneous feeling here that suggests going with what sounds good and feels right, rather than being too bound up in overarching ideas and self-imposed rules.

There are grooves, too, of course. 'Hell' opens the album with swirling mists of sound eventually pinned down by the kind of pulsating, clicking electronic hip hop beat that Autechre fans will know so well. 'Rainlines' uses a simple 4/4 techno kick as the vehicle for its luscious third chord keyboard riff, layers of dusty static – a constant across the album, perhaps not surprising given its title – and the odd hi-hat and drum machine snippet lending it a real vintage Detroit feel.

'My Ways' revolves around what could be a hypnotic loop of a ringing bell and an addictive piano refrain, both filtered so heavily they resemble nothing you've ever heard. Somewhere deep down in the mix there might be a human voice struggling to emerge – or that could just be your imagination. It's impossible to tell.

'Six' also uses that familiar four-to-the-floor pulse, although its clouds of hazy hum and imagined interference are more benign here, leaving an impression like an ancient, bittersweet memory. 'Cafe Del Mars' has an Orb-like innocence to it, with arpeggios bubbling away like air making its way to the surface of the sea. It's an infectious, head-nodding, ambient techno classic.

'Dolphin Spray', meanwhile, takes the off-kilter thump of a dancehall beat and pairs it with a wiry, hyperactive Casiotone sound. 'System Verse' is like the spectral negative image of a pumping techno track, its bass drum aggression suppressed while puffs of serene ambience float by.

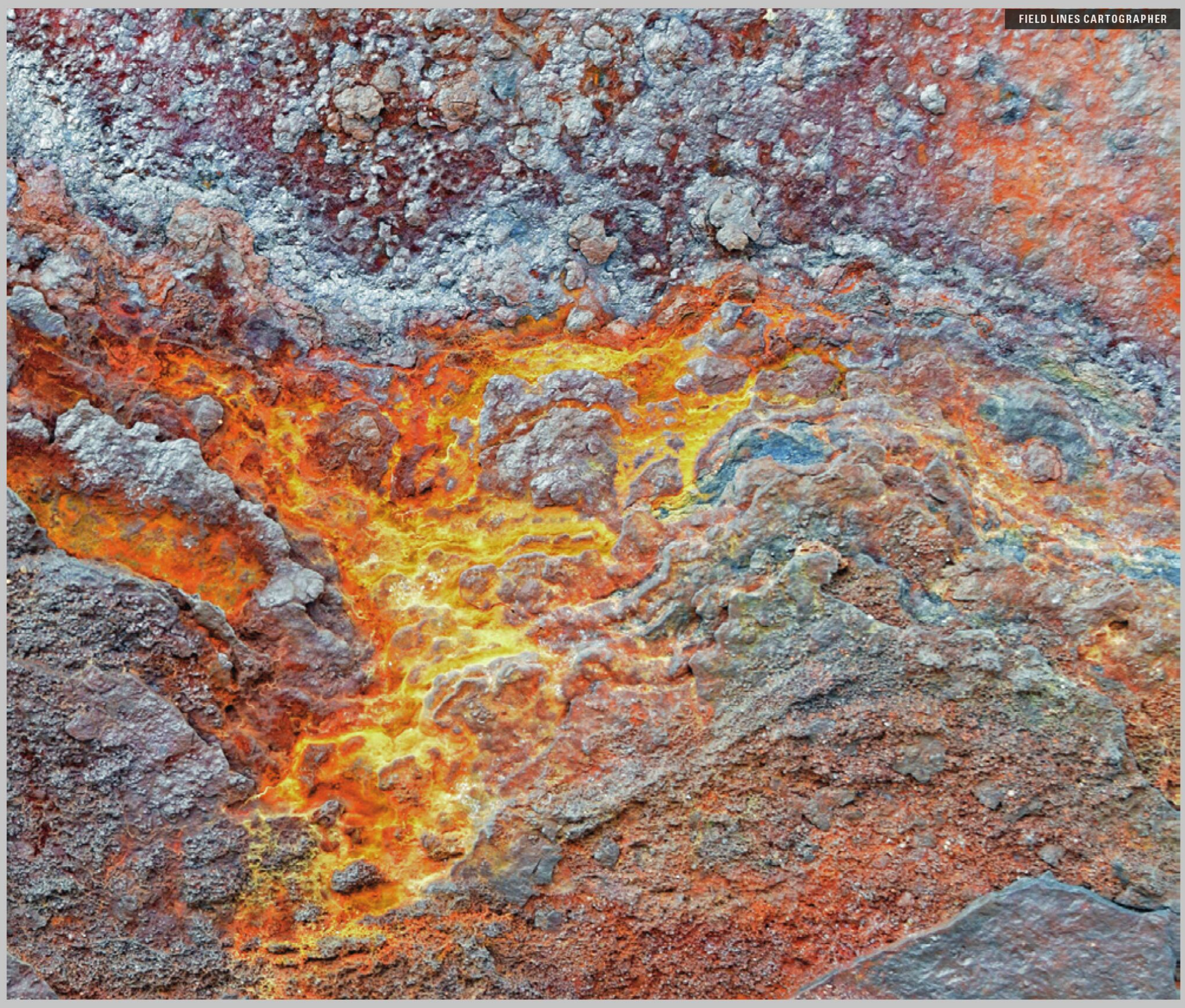
These tracks are balanced by and interspersed with nebulous experiments which are every bit as powerful as their more beat-laden counterparts. 'Doves Over Atlantis', which along with 'Dolphin Spray' is the most obvious nod to a loose theme of oceans and water, is expansive and grand. It's a graceful slow-motion piece that's as much about the notes that aren't there as the ones that are. Its title may suggest flight above the sea, but the music itself is like witnessing rays of light penetrating the murky depths and then retreating again. Conversely, 'Ray' gathers pace and coalesces around another ghostly kick, rumbling along like distant thunder that never disappears, but equally never seems to get any closer.

The album has an unexpected trajectory, melting down into totally horizontal floatation by the time we reach 'Mellow Checx', which signs things off on an exquisitely optimistic note. Evoking a touch of Global Communication's sunshine cheeriness, albeit in a dirtier and grungier form, it's probably the album's most straightforwardly beautiful track. Its circular riffs fade somewhere around the four-minute mark but, you feel, might be continuing on infinitely somewhere in another universe, leaving the listener both totally calmed and strangely exhilarated.

All in all, 'Statik' is the sound of an artist at his peak, confident about taking risks and pushing the boundaries, but also reconnecting to what he does best. His experiments with the classical world were fascinating, but here Cunningham shows he's still capable of being just as original and inventive with good old-fashioned electronica. Sail on, sailor.

BEN WILLMOTT

THE BACK



FIELD LINES CARTOGRAPHER

Portable Reality Generator

DiN

We can't exactly be sure what a portable reality generator might look like… a pocket calculator with added multi-dimensions, perhaps? In any case, the ever-reliable Field Lines Cartographer (Lancaster's Mark Burford), is on hand to guide us through the unknown. The mind-expanding, resonant drones of 'The Sun In Splendour' are as suitable for guided meditation as a soundtrack for astronauts. Pattering electronics on 'Scattered Light' then lead us deeper into a cosmic realm, before 'Ascending Waves Of Consciousness' blows the whole thing wide open. Far out, but also thrillingly inward-looking. **CF**

STACKS

Want

KNEKELHUIS

Belgian duo Stacks lay down some sublime, dubby synthpop on their third full-length effort, 'Want'. With twinges of post-punk, swelling synths and tasteful guitar, Stacks tackle the evergreen song themes of missing, wanting, longing… in short, all the classic preoccupations of love. It's familiar turf, but with a contemporary twist, as tracks like 'Run Away' exude a subdued 1980s coldwave melodrama with icy, echoing vocals, and 'On The Heels' channels Depeche Mode at their most bittersweet. Perfect for scratching that nostalgic itch. **FH**

YORKSHIRE MODULAR SOCIETY

Fiery The Angels Fell

DRAGON'S EYE

Yorkshire Modular Society is one of several aliases used by Dom Oxynucid, an electronic musician who seemingly makes his music in a magical cave in English woodland. If that suggests some sort of folksy, psychedelic angle, the single-track, hour-long 'Fiery The Angels Fell' points instead to a tragic urban dystopia. Inspired by the turbulent emotional process of grieving, the piece oscillates rapidly between haunted shadows and muted, elegiac peaks, yet retains a delicate and enveloping stillness. Cathartic, and also hopeful. **MS**

MICROCORPS

Macrocorpse

THE TAPEWORM

Musical polymath Alexander Tucker's Microcorps alter ego is not for the faint-hearted. His tribal, deconstructionist techno fuses elements of Blanck Mass' dark-matter chaos and Pye Corner Audio's spectral dystopia into a dense sonic maelstrom. Created as part of this tape-only label's 15th anniversary celebrations, 'Macrocorpse' is held together by a complex compositional frame that's both manic and elaborately detailed, with tracks like 'LIIOI' firing us to the edge of the abyss, while elsewhere 'NEKR' comes over like a sacrificial rite for committed pagan-futurists. Superb. **CG**

FIN
Cleats
HAUSU MOUNTAIN

In her visual artwork, Canadian musician and artist Fin Simonetti uses materials such as stained glass and metal to create delicate, if slightly unsettling objects, and she conjured a similar feeling on her debut album, 2017's 'Ice Pix'. This disquieting abstraction remains on 'Cleats', but the intensity and density reaches new levels. 'Feudal Reader' combines bubbling electronics with haunted chimes, while 'Egress' creaks and groans like a stretched oil tanker. The mixture is constantly tempered by Simonetti's beautiful vocal chill, creating a formula that's heavier, crunchier and deeply satisfying. **ST**

RON GEESIN
Basic Maths
TRUNK

Take a long-forgotten ITV Schools programme from 1980, then add psychedelic electro pioneer Ron Geesin. What does that equal? Why, this charming collection of wobbly synth cues, composed by the impish Geesin to soundtrack the number-based antics of one-time 'Play School' presenter Fred Harris. From the unsettling ambience of 'Soft Mirrors' to the jolly plod of 'Old Seagull And Chips', it's a heartwarming testament to Geesin's sense of musical mischief, and only slightly triggering to those of us still suffering flashbacks to the trauma of long division. **BF**

LUDWIG BERGER
Garden Of Ediacara
-OUS

Last heard breaking the interspecies sound barrier on 'Photosynthetic Beats' (2023), exclusively made with photosynthetic pond life noise, Ludwig Berger ascends above the natural and the synthetic alike on 'Garden Of Ediacara'. Attaining an ineffably post-human position, Berger seems to stumble through an astonishingly plausible parallel world. Glistening, mythical sounds flutter and morph into musical arrangements, forming like crystals in a liquid solution. 'Bake Airwaves Into Symbols?' sets the off-world tone with lurching, warped vocals and harp-like plucks of an alien zither. **FH**

LYLO
Thoughts Of Never
EL RANCHO

Six years after the release of their effervescent second album 'Post Era', Scottish outfit LYLO return sounding a little older and wiser on 'Thoughts Of Never'. Recorded between Glasgow and Berlin, the 10 tracks channel world-weariness into an elegant, soothing balm of neo-soul and neon-lit 1980s synthpop, with the sleekness of China Crisis and The Blue Nile, and the cool breeziness of Icehouse (as on 'We Move Again'). If this album was a colour, it would be International Klein Blue – profound, luminescent and full of space and dreams. **CF**

EAMON IVRI
In The Red Eye Of The Evening
SPIRITUALS

Cork musician Eamon Ivri drops his lauded Lighght alias on this touchingly vulnerable album for Phantom Limb's ambient sub-label, Spirituals. A rare honesty is present throughout 'In The Red Eye Of The Evening', an unpretentiousness in the blend of field recordings and subtle synthesis. Ivri ties knots in a peculiarly engaging, idiosyncratic fashion, and a murky, wayward opening settles radiantly into place on 'Inhabited Vessel', where water sings harmonies while running over metal and lazy stream-of-consciousnes poems form and scatter like soap bubbles on a Sunday breeze. **FH**

MOON DIAGRAMS
Cemetery Classics
SONIC CATHEDRAL

The second solo album by Moses Archuleta (Deerhunter) explores the worlds of synthpop, industrial noise, trip hop, shoegaze and Leonard Cohen. To say it's an album of eclectic extremes is an understatement. Despite this, thanks to the skilful production of Simian Mobile Disco's James Ford, it's an utterly cohesive set that shifts with languid ease between the brilliant otherworldly pop of 'Very Much My Promise To You' and the abrasive tension of 'Listen To Me'. **MJ**

TAKKAK TAKKAK
Takkak Takkak
NYEGE NYEGE TAPES

Takkak Takkak is the new project from Shigeru Ishihara (aka Scotch Rolex) and Mo'ong Santoso Pribadi, an Indonesian composer living in Lithuania. A prolific artist, Ishihara has recently worked with ritual trance maestro Shackleton on the percussion-based 'The Three Hands Of Doom'. Takkak Takkak up the polyrhythmic assault even further, as well as the proliferation of Javanese and Indonesian folk dance rituals, summoning ancestral spirits for some serious raving. On this self-titled album, frantic, paradiddling hands meet mind-melting electronic drones on brilliantly in-your-face tracks like 'Garang'. **JA**

22 BEACHES
Dust: Recordings 1980-1984
SEATED

Scottish new wave/post-punk outfit 22 Beaches must have been dreaming of warmer climes when they wrote much of the material that comprises 'Dust: Recordings 1980-1984', a greatest hits-style mini-album thoughtfully curated by Glasgow's Seated Records. From A Certain Ratio-esque funk on 'One Of Us', to the glorious Balearic dub slant of 'Dust', sunny vitality is suffused throughout these revived cassette recordings. They played DIY shows prolifically and once shared a bill with the Cocteau Twins, but fame remained elusive. Here's hoping this captivating snapshot rectifies that. **CF**

SOLPARA
Melancholy Sabotage
OTHER PEOPLE

It's dark in here. This Lebanese-American producer flits between a number of genres on his debut album, but the spectre of 1980s goth looms largest. 'Time To Hold Better' echoes with shards of Joy Division-esque guitar and 2000s dubstep, while 'Measures' rides on a breakbeat and synth line that's a close relation to 'Voodoo Ray' – its buried-in-the-mix vocal sounds like an acid house record made by Andrew Eldritch. There are plenty of great ideas here, though the fusty gloom may have you eventually yearning for some fresh air. **WS**

ECOVILLAGE
Crescendo
LO

'Crescendo' is the spellbinding collaboration between renowned Swedish producers Emil Holmström and Peter Wikström, aka Ecovillage, and a stellar cast of improvisation-inclined luminaries. This includes experimental saxophonist Joseph Shabason, new age zither exponent Laraaji and Nightlands, the side-project of The War On Drugs bassist Dave Hartley. The vaporous 'Around The Fire' is among the highlights, alongside the lush, intricate strings of 'The Will Of The One'. The rest of this luxuriant, blissfully uplifting ambient-pop creation is just as captivating, speaking of endless summers and soaring optimism. **CG**

LANARK ARTEFAX
Metallur
AD 93

The first release in five years from Lanark Artefax is a tightly wound and often inhospitable addition to the Scottish producer's sparse output, and reaffirms his position as something of an enigma. The five tracks conjure grey skies and ashen landscapes, with the low end as cavernous as a 500-foot drop into darkness. Synthesisers loom threateningly over the beatless 'Tris', and punishing drum programming characterises 'Meszthread', though there is respite with the title track as an incoherent alien communique tries to reach through the void. **TI**

BEN UNDERWOOD
Outdoor Work
WOODFORD HALSE

"I can still vividly see the plastic beads from the red, yellow and green stained glass windows and the blue Alice bands that we glued together night after night," explains Sheffield's Ben Underwood. The title of this delicate collection comes from the outsourced local factory work his mum once undertook, and – following her death – he poured these childhood memories into a series of wistfully jazzy guitar improvisations. 'A Pink Sun Sets' is gently elegiac, 'Superkings' hints at working class steel, and 'Bev' is a playfully minimalist homage to a clearly indomitable woman. **BF**

ICEBOY VIOLET & NUEEN
You Said You'd Hold My Hand Through The Fire
HYPERDUB

Last year saw Iceboy Violet release their debut album 'Not A Dream But A Controlled Explosion' and also guest on Space Afrika and Rainy Miller's 'A Grisaille Wedding'. It's the second of those records that's the clearest signpost for where the Mancunian artist is headed on this collaborative long-player with Barcelona producer Nueen. Similarly fashioned as a concept album about a love affair, on tracks such as 'Closer' and 'Terrence's Time Bomb' Violet's impressionistic lyrics and aching voice serve as a guiding light through a maze of mournful, murky electronics. **PC**

STUMBLEINE
Deleted Scene
MONOTREME

Bristol producer Peter Cooper has spent over a decade honing his dreamlike sound, with ample use of phased guitars, glitchy beats and sped-up vocal samples. His eighth album continues in this vein but sounds glossier, more polished somehow. It's aptly named too, as several of the tracks here could work perfectly as film and TV syncs. 'Ursa Minor Sleeps Forever' is a beautiful minor-key piece with chiming synth motifs, while on 'Catastrophette' piano and strings gently intrude to frame a hazy sepia-tinted scene. Gorgeous. **WS**

TYMON DOGG AND THE DACOITS
The Granada Sessions
TINY GLOBAL

Punk-psych polymath Tymon Dogg and one-time PiL drummer Richard Dudanski were both members of Joe Strummer's pre-Clash band The 101'ers, and now decamp to Strummer's beloved southern Spain to create this thrillingly eclectic album. So 'Wheel Of Life And Death' is an urgent, violin-led stomp, whereas 'Cruel Mind' is a Hammond-heavy lament to the rise of the far right. The highlight, though, is the closing track 'Turning Of The World', a soulful shrug worthy of Dexy's Midnight Runners, with Dogg somehow managing to sound both defeated and defiant. **BF**

CHIHEI HATAKEYAMA & SHUN ISHIWAKA
Magnificent Little Dudes Vol 1
GEARBOX

A commitment to improvisational practice links the prolific and often collaborative work of ambient musician Chihei Hatakeyama and jazz drummer Shun Ishiwaka.
On this unfurling album, they meld their respective styles to create a suite of diffuse and tactile pieces. The opening track 'M0' is a sheet of serene, languid atmospherics which cover Ishiwaka's muted drumming like the sensation of a distant thunderstorm, and when both musicians' performances click, as on 'M1 2', they reach the heights of the loftiest 1990s canon of shoegaze and post-rock. **TI**

DRUM & LACE
ONDA
FABRIQUE

Italian musician and composer Sofia Degli Alessandri-Hultquist, aka Drum & Lace, is inspired by nature, using numerous field recordings in her work. They're woven very carefully and subtly into her electronic manoeuvres, lending them an original, organic atmosphere that's hard to pin down. The likes of 'Nymph' and 'Conchiglie' revolve around lightly employed percussion and sequences, leaving plenty of room for sweeping synths to swell and bloom. Mellow clarinet, meanwhile, adds some dignified grandeur to 'Plus' (featuring Patrick Shiroishi), giving it a touch of Andrew Weatherall's evocative classic 'Smokebelch'. **BW**

HIRIHARA
Khayin
BOOMARM NATION

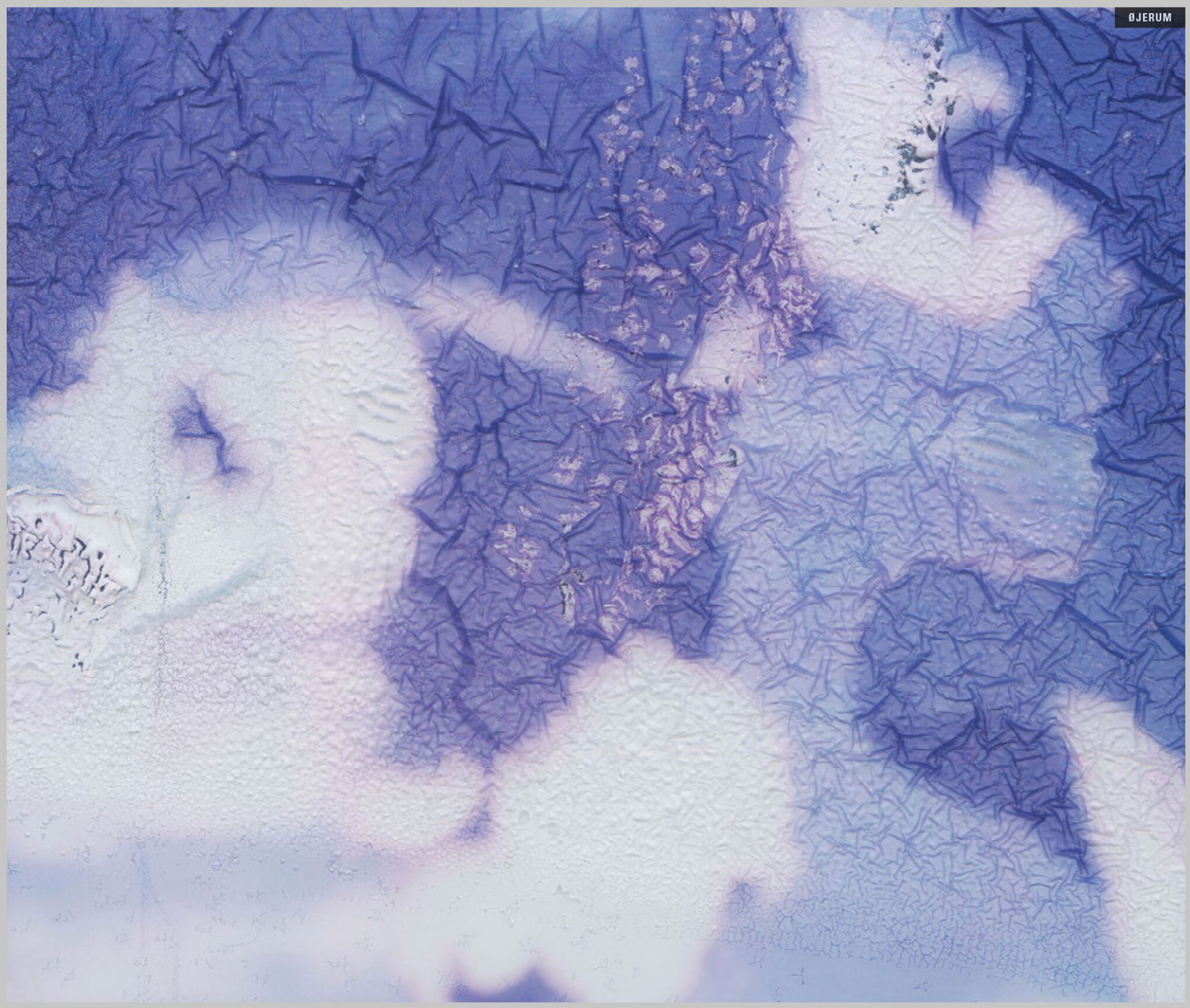
Across the nine tracks on 'Khayin', Mediterranean producer HiriHara explores deep, moody sound design, percussive rhythms, strident dub basslines and tasteful notes of Arabic and northern Saharan influence. The drama-laden 'Sarab' demonstrates patience and balance, while the journeying 'Exes' is full-scale, techno-esque club gear. Other notable highlights include a collaboration with the elusive Algerian artist El Mahdy Jr, who offers a rare collaboration on 'Joal', and an original remix of 'Mother' to close out this impressive piece. **FH**

RICHARD CHARTIER
On Leaving
TOUCH

Richard Chartier's 'On Leaving' is a collection of five compositions dedicated to his late friend, the artist and musician Steve Roden. "Steve saw and heard everything between the noise… no matter how faint," explains Chartier in the sleeve notes. He would have adored these pieces. 'Variance.1' opens into a subtly shifting sea of microtonal textures which, like Roden's own work, gradually change shape. The simmering drones of 'Variance.2' and 'Variance.a' are beautiful, meditative spaces and, in their tribute to Roden, they also provide an incredibly affecting layer of meaning. **ST**

PABLO DISERENS
Turning Porous
FORMS OF MINUTIAE

'Turning Porous' is the product of field recordist Pablo Diserens' two-month residency in Galicia in northern Spain, where they spent time recording the local aquatic population for an exhibition. Despite being formed primarily from natural sources, the dense meshes of bleeps, whirs, tweets and ticks that comprise 'Riparian Zone' sound completely alien and electronic, while a thickening drone cutting through the dead centre of the piece only amplifies a sense of sonic displacement. Eavesdropping on the endless drama of nature has rarely sounded as thrilling as it does through Diserens' microphone. **MS**



ØJERUM
En Sten For Solen
QUIET DETAILS

Copenhagen multidisciplinary artist Paw Grabowski's music exists in the quietest of corners. With the album title translating to 'A Stone To The Sun', this is a characteristically mystique-filled listen with a strong emotional undercurrent. Pieces like 'Hundrede År Fra Nu' ('A Hundred Years From Now') and 'Når Glaslegemer Trækker Sig Sammen' ('When Bodies Of Glass Contract') counterbalance slowly coalescing melodies with a layer of elusive white noise, alternately sounding like waves on a beach or a jazz percussionist softly brushing a snare drum. A poetic, fragile and beatific experience. **MS**

VANADIUM
Better Times
SIN HILO

Electronica in Spain is effervescent right now, with a myriad of upcoming artists foregrounding abstract beats. Madrid's Vanadium is among the most interesting of this new wave, meshing ambient, post-rock and dance music into a distinctive sound of his own. On his second album 'Better Times', melodies veer between optimism and melancholy, with the lush 'Before Summer' all skipping drum machines and bittersweet tones, and 'End Of The Day' an elegiac, beatless piece. Beautiful and emotive. **BM**

STRAND OF OAKS
Miracle Focus
WESTERN VINYL

Prolific folk-rocker Tim Showalter takes an unexpected creative turn and frames his emotion-charged voice with synthesisers for the first time on this, his eighth studio album. His inspirations include American spiritual teacher Ram Dass, clearly evident in the triumphant 'Ascend You', which is not unlike a Balearic overhaul of Jon And Vangelis' work. Nods to Alice Coltrane, Beastie Boys, and Freddie Mercury also surface, with Mercury's sense of drama showing up on 'Communication'. The favourite though is 'Fantasy Wranglers', where strummed guitar and oozing synths keep extremely catchy company. **BW**

GRYPHON RUE
4n_Objx
BANDCAMP

New York producer Gryphon Rue appears to be able to do in stereo what other artists need spatial sound for. Where so much music lies flat, Rue's second album '4n_Objx' somehow lifts itself up from the surface and tantalises with its shimmering aural mirage. 'High Priestess' dances like a flickering flame as the rhythmic energy from beneath the track comes at the listener with the force of a steam train. 'Alluvials', meanwhile, sparkles and hypnotises like Cluster at the height of their powers. **JA**

MUI ZYU
Nothing Or Something To Die For
FATHER / DAUGHTER

Eva Lui's second solo album retains the agreeable wonkiness of her 2023 debut 'Rotten Bun For An Eggless Century', but feels like a more fully realised vision. Some of the Hong Kong-British musician's vocals sit at peculiar angles to the music, and unexpected instrumental outbursts add to the air of charming oddness, like the sudden splash of guitar on 'Donna Like Parasites', or the way swarms of angry synths invade 'Sparky'. Keep an eye on Lui – this is an artist who walks the tightrope between pop and experimental with aplomb. **WS**

ORBURY COMMON
Sylvan Chute
PRAH

Emlyn Bainbridge and Josh Day-Jones describe this terrific debut album as "a musical map of abstract melodramas" and you can't fault their ambition. There are folk guitars, pulsating beats, spiralling choirs – and that's just on the opening track 'Golden Time'. Like The Beta Band conducting some appalling arcane ritual, the duo encapsulate this beguilingly odd world on the bafflingly brilliant 'Jaundice & The Pipermen'. "I thought I saw a dog in a car / And then I saw a dog in a car / A coincidence which shakes you to the core." Quite. **BF**

BIANCA SCOUT
Pattern Damage
SFERIC

Newcastle artist Bianca Scout makes otherworldly music that's a synthesis of various artforms, indivisible from her work as a dancer and performer. 'Pattern Damage', her fifth studio album, heralds an "age of gothic, technocratic dystopia". It's certainly a strange, dislocated journey, always keeping the listener at one remove, to the point it almost feels voyeuristic. Guest appearances from Darkmarik on 'Forest Spirit' and Mun Sing on 'Midnight' add to the latent drama, with the songs built from atmospheres and moods rather than melodic hooks. **JA**

LES CYCLADES
Glika
HI SCORES

Described as "proto-Balearism, saxophone techno and olive oil dub", this debut album from Franco-Canadian duo Alex and Ludo as Les Cyclades really hits the sweet spot. The pair blend Greek myth-evoking found sounds and Mediterranean high-summer fantasy into their postmodern palette of savvy space-disco, house and minimal Detroit techno. They lure us away from the humdrum with sensuous creations like 'Parc Fou' and its retro, Ibiza sundowner atmospherics, and the minimalist, synthwave hypnotics of 'DRAM'. Unmissable. **CG**

DAVID BOULTER
St Ann's
CLAY PIPE

Opening with 'Plantagenet Street In The Morning' and its nostalgic lines of playground-recorded nursery rhymes ('Here We Go Looby Loo', 'Ring-A-Ring-A-Roses'), Tindersticks keyboardist David Boulter takes us back to his early 1970s childhood in the titular district of Nottingham. When his family moved from the notorious monochrome squalor of old Victorian St Ann's to its shiny new utopian council estate version – with indoor toilets, central heating and cherry blossom trees – "everything came into colour".

His story of inner-city renewal and egalitarian optimism is told with elegant acoustics and subtle vintage electronics, vibraphone included, and pays poignant homage to a time and place that now feels elusive. The languorous pastoralism of 'Blue Bell Hill' perhaps encapsulates all this best. Its comforting, tenor recorder-framed wistfulness evokes early learning and more innocent, idealistic times, and is as close to daydream-perfect as it gets. The pealing church bells of 'Along The St Ann's Road' might allude to the lifelong happiness Boulter's parents shared in their revolutionary social abode. These are memories you feel Boulter still holds intact, golden and untarnished. **CG**

LAMUSA II
DON'T
EXTENDED TECHNIQUES

The mysterious Italian musician Lamusa II makes a welcome return via Jay Glass Dubs' Extended Techniques label with 'DON'T', an album that speaks in imperatives, not warnings or requests. Its 15 tracks curl out from the speakers like dreary smoke, kick-stepping on a classic trip hop pulse throughout. This is no 1990s chill joint, though. There's an insistent sort of ferocity that you get from classic post-punk – not pacey or ostentatious fury, but a more mature, educated rage, that befits the stripped-back arrangements.

A clutch of collaborators, including the illustrious Marie Davidson and Italian artist Zara Colombo, adorn the scarred beat of tracks like 'And I Hated It' and 'Eleven, One Two' with lyrics dripping in deadpan humour, embodying the album's quirky personality. Elsewhere, the dubby 'La Mecánica' and jazzy 'Please Shut Up' adopt a groovy swagger. Lamusa II effortlessly wrings out a cool, concentrated essence from within his music, with each piece perfectly formed, exact in delivery, experimental in approach and arresting on impact. Superb. **FH**

NOVÝ SVĚT
DeGenerazione
QUINDI

Austrian experimental folk duo Nový Svět first began recording 'DeGenerazione' in 2007, but later abandoned the tracks in favour of releasing a more overtly electronic album, 'Todas Las Últimas Cosas', accompanied by some early demos. The 'DeGenerazione' recordings have since been extricated from a crumbling master tape, and are being made available on vinyl for the first time so listeners can enjoy them in all their ominous, apocalyptic glory.

It's not an unchallenging listen with tracks like 'No Mas' and 'Al Fuego' sporting an often disconcerting mix of neo-surrealism, folky tendencies and the avant-garde. But despite this, the album is also deeply hypnotic, with vocalist Jürgen Weber's close, gravelly whispers cutting through the musical unease on tracks like early highlight 'Ciudacanta', drawing you in as though you're listening to your own innermost thoughts. Nový Svět have been defunct now for over 15 years, but as proven by this long-awaited release, their audacious sound and ability to fuse together the unlikeliest of genres lends their music an unmistakable timelessness. **IB**

AJA
Ajasphère Vol II
BANDCAMP

Clémence Quélennec was one of France's most recognisable pop stars for eight years, as the red beret-sporting lead singer of electro-psych outfit La Femme. Then in 2018 she took a left-field turn, retreating to Morocco where she has been making new age music with synthesisers, flutes and voice synthesis ever since.

Quélennec's second solo album is a low-key follow-up to the even lower-key first volume, which offered atmospheric succour during the pandemic year of 2020. 'Ajasphère Vol II' feels more strident and impressive, even if the overall objective is to blend into the environment rather than stand out. It's psychedelic at times, but a long way from her former band's 2013 krautrock-influenced long-player 'Psycho Tropical Berlin'. This latest effort is beautifully weighted from start to finish, with abundant celestial textures that never fail to lift the spirits. 'Sceaurore', featuring Canblaster, is a particular highlight – a hypnotic five minutes that can surely count itself as one of the most beguiling ambient tracks of the year. **JA**

BRITISH MURDER BOYS
Active Agents And House Boys
DOWNWARDS

Surgeon and Regis are back to loosen your fillings. It's taken them over two decades to shove this debut album into our screaming faces. Rusted synth loops, jackhammer bass drums, and production so abrasive it'll rip out your spleen at 20 paces. Lead single 'Now, This Is You' has an arpeggio vortex collapsing into aggro reverb, while the fast-balling 'The Set Up Man' is a roller-disco skating through Satan's large intestine.

Despite this, we're a million frequencies on from the Hulk-smash of their early material with Counterbalance. Regis litters each track with dubwise pronouncements, his semi-lucid vocals ricocheting madly. And the first-draft ferocity of these improvisational sessions makes BMB sound dangerously loose, as if their brains are fizzing and we should find the exit door before they duff us up with a pool cue. Decades in the making, but as fresh as a daisy. That's doused in acid. With the petals chainsawed off. Welcome back, Boys. **FR**

RICHIE CULVER
Hostile Environments
SELF-RELEASED

For all that Richie Culver dwells on depression and decay, the Hull artist hasn't lacked the motivation to make striking music since 2022's debut album 'I Was Born By The Sea'. This mini-album follows his second LP 'Scream If You Don't Exist' and an EP of soot-caked techno under his Quiet Husband alias, both released in the last six months alone, yet Culver still sounds like a man stuck in a cycle of despair.

'Slow Car' is a bitter-as-a-pint-of-battery-acid tribute to Tracy Chapman's 'Fast Car', replacing the original's optimism with lyrics like, "In your slow car / In your small town / That you never did leave", and a soundscape evoking the wind blowing through a burned-out wreck. Descriptions of smashed windows and groaning synths in 'Difficult' certainly depict 'Hostile Environments', but the likes of 'Bedsit' suggest the album title might also refer to the pain of love, feeling less like a romantic letter written on perfumed paper, and more like a suicide note scratched into a concrete wall. **PC**

µ-ZIQ
Grush
PLANET MU

Mike Paradinas' last µ-Ziq album '1977' had an acute case of nostalgia. You might even suspect he chose to release it on Balmat, rather than his own Planet Mu, so as not to compromise the latter's reputation for resolutely forward-thinking sounds. Except that, now he's back home, 'Grush' sees the Hove-based producer donning the rose-tinted specs once more.

Whereas the ambient and kosmische styles of '1977' felt like the soundtrack to an early 90s afterparty, 'Grush' returns to the rave before. Or, at the very least, hazy memories of the sort of underground parties happening around the time of µ-Ziq's seminal albums like 'Tango N' Vectif' 30 years ago. That sense of temporal slippage is highlighted by the time-stretched breakbeats in tracks like 'Manscape'. The synth line on 'Metaphonk' is an untrammeled trance flashback and 'Hastings' is the best tune Boards Of Canada never made. But retrospection doesn't mean regression, with intricate drum programming and nimble basslines keeping Paradinas dancing ahead of his many imitators. **PC**

PABLO'S EYE
The Light Was Sharp, Our Eyes Were Open
STROOM

The fact that Pablo's Eye describe themselves as a "temporary atmosphere" rather than a band will probably give you some clue as to the nature of their sound. The work of the long-running Belgian collective led by Axel Libeert has traditionally encompassed atmospheric ambient textures, poetic spoken word pieces and delicate, ephemeral melodies.

'The Light Was Sharp, Our Eyes Were Open', their latest album, is no different, though this is not to say that it doesn't break new ground. Tracks like 'Breezes Were Polar Storms' and 'The Dog Days Are Long Gone' are imbued with a cool, transcendental grace that the outfit have not previously explored in such depth. This is offset elsewhere by pensive, deliberate melodies ('The Mirror') and piercing electronic wails suspended over hissing breakbeats ('Red Light Returning'), resulting in an album that both soothes and stimulates in equal measure. **IB**

THE SECRET SCREENS (FEATURING SIR-VERE)
Relics Part 1 / Relics Part 2
WORLDSOUND / VIRGIN MUSIC GROUP

Now that the genre-bending activities of Milton Keynes four-piece Sir-Vere – veteran experts at combining electronica flourishes, dancefloor firepower and punk attitude – have finally won big label interest, the rather sizeable task of reissuing their bulging back catalogue has begun. The Secret Screens project has found itself rushed to the front of the queue under sad circumstances – the recent tragic passing of one its lynchpins, pioneering UK hip hop and hardcore producer Ian "Spatts" Allen (The Criminal Minds and later, Environmental Science).

This two-album, 46-track package is the story of their pick-and-mix genius, and although it dates back to 2009, it still sounds ahead of the game. 'Gorgeous (Grunt Version)' is like Baxter Dury and James Brown combining forces to make a 90-second acid house classic. 'Drum Lord' fuses breaks and drum 'n' bass, with a guest vocal from Spatts' own toddler daughter. Arthur Baker guests on the dreamy 'A Tribute To NYC', half original hip hop snazziness and half 90s electronica tones, and 'Riot Act' is a glorious Depth Charge-style percussive onslaught. Wall-to-wall greatness. How did they not become huge? **BW**

EX-EASTER ISLAND HEAD

Norther

ROCKET

Lauded minimalists widen sonic palette

Since 2009, "experimental outliers" Ex-Easter Island Head have gradually built an ardent following and received widespread plaudits for their distinctive minimalist compositions and unconventional approach. Inspired by the likes of Steve Reich, Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca, they forge percussive symphonies of prepared electric guitars – laid flat and played with mallets and sticks – which build progressively from melodic improv into something quite magical.

Centred around the quartet of Benjamin D Duvall, Andrew PM Hunt, Jon Hering and Ben Fair, EEIH is an evolving entity that takes on ideas like a sponge. Over time, various side projects (Dialect, Land Trance), collaborations and performances – with Salford Large Electric Ensemble, the BBC Philharmonic and others – have only served to expand and enhance their exhilarating sonic palette.

The group's latest album 'Norther', a reference to the cold winter wind billowing down from the North, continues this creative progression with plangent, manipulated electroacoustics that widen their scope and up the ante. Working from their home studio in Liverpool, 'Norther' has been eight years in the making, and it shows. Meticulously crafted and deeply rich in tone and texture, you're soon completely absorbed in its mesmeric repetition, deft undulations and complex layers.

The free-form expression throughout is quite extraordinary. The sprawling clatter and jangle of the opening track 'Weather' is like being pounded by the ASMR-like patter of persistent rain, its ominous bass hum depicting the murky grey clouds that loom threateningly overhead. All drone-like heft and ambient poise, 'Lodestone' shimmers with purpose before reaching its shiver-inducing denouement. And the florid groove of the thumping title track harnesses the power of an actual norther via a "ramshackle" aeolian harp "played" by the wind.

'Magnetic Language' sees a slight change of tack as the band's voices are played back through smartphones, amplified by electric guitar pick-ups, and then refracted to create an exalted "latticed chorale" that jolts the senses before taking you off to some cosmic firmament beyond the stars. What a trip.

A euphoric and majestic career high, 'Norther' is a truly innovative and defining piece of work that will surely see Ex-Easter Island Head garner the wider exposure they very much deserve.

VELIMIR ILIC

The Best Of...

µ-Ziq man and Planet Mu boss **Mike Paradinas** bares all

What's the best breakfast cereal? "I don't really eat cereal now, but when I did it was Weetabix. Honey nut cornflakes are good, but full of sugar."
Sock length? "Thigh-high."
Record label? "Can I say Planet Mu?"
Type of tea? "Reality. At the moment we have Tetley or Yorkshire Tea."
Walking spot? "The wasteland behind Sainsbury's where I walk the dog."
Fruit? "Peaches."
Gift you've received? "I got a KitKat and a pencil case for my 13th birthday."
Mountain range? "Not much of a choice in Sussex."
Choice of loungewear? "H&M joggers."
Website? "The internet."
Music format? "Low bitrate mp3."
Surprise birthday party? "Would you believe I've never given or been given one?"
Holiday destination? "New York – I went there for my honeymoon and there was no shortage of things to do."
Record shop? "I think the original 1990 FatCat in Covent Garden, London. I know there was one in Crawley before that, but I never went there."
Board game? "Trivial Pursuit."
Book on your shelf? "'Breakfast Of Champions' by Kurt Vonnegut."
TV series? "'Heimat' by Edgar Reitz – series one, two and three."
Hot drink? "Hot chocolate."
Cold drink? "Gin and tonic."
Politician? "Mo Mowlam."
Biscuit? "Lotus Speculoos."
Country? "None of them. All humans are terrible."
City? "Brighton and Hove."
Village? "Shitterton, Dorset."
Building? "Lloyd's Building."
Song for driving to? "'Arcadian (Castilian II)' by Ceephax Acid Crew."
Hair do? "Geek Pie."
Bowie album? "'Low'."
Restaurant? "Palmito in Hove is a current favourite."
Advice to live by? "Be careful, because there's always someone ready to step into your shoes and do your job better than you."
Music venue? "I quite like FOLD in London, where I played last week."
Smell? "Mould or cat piss. Something with staying power."
Date idea? "Naked hot-air ballooning."
Festival you've been to? "None of them."
Bed you've ever slept in? "Novotel, Lyon."

µ-Ziq's 'Grush' is out now on Planet Mu

Buried Treasure

DAVID BEHRMAN

On The Other Ocean

LOVELY MUSIC, 1978

Back when CD-Rs were the lingua franca of the underground electronic world, Brian Horst of The Noisettes handed me a copy of David Behrman's 'On The Other Ocean'. He had burned it for me after a long night of scarfing at Taco Bell and feeding cassette experiments into his battered laptop. This was apparently a "must have" ambient release, and there's no telling how many generations it was removed from the source by the time I pressed play.

As it turns out, Behrman had produced both Terry Riley's landmark 'In C' and 'A Rainbow In Curved Air'. He was later teaching at Mills College in Oakland, California at the new location of the historic San Francisco Tape Music Center, when he recorded what would be his debut release – laid down in just one go with a collection of homemade gear, bassoon and flute.

"I had homemade synthesisers and their different functions were switched by this little computer called the KIM-1," Behrman remembers today. "You had to program it in machine language. And that would change the dynamics and tuning of the oscillators. One synthesiser had two banks of 16 and the other had three banks of three. All triangle waves. I didn't really know what the hell I was doing. I just brought this thing that I had been working on, that we had never played together."

For more than 23 minutes, the side-long title piece emerges like fog that's crept in so slowly overnight, its pace hovers near the imperceptible. Periodically the programme shifts from the KIM-1 causing the soft triangle drones to hiccup, as if someone had accidentally put their thumb on the tape reel.

'Figure In A Clearing' occupies the flip-side, and was recorded at an earlier date in Albany with the woodwinds swapped out for cellos. Equally hypnotic, both tracks successfully render that rare acoustic-electronic space that sounds as much like the future as it does the past.

Celebrated by indie groovers like Belle & Sebastian (who included it on their instalment of the 'Late Night Tales Vol II' series), original copies of 'On The Other Ocean' trade hands for three-figure sums in good condition. In The Noisettes' terms, that's a lot of Taco Bell.

David Berhman, who recently reprised some of his work live at the 34th Interpretations series in New York, is somewhat surprised by the sustained interest.

"It was just one of those magic accidents," he says.

JOE SILVA

JOHN CALE

POPtical Illusion

DOUBLE SIX / DOMINO

Velvets founder on a late-career high

The questing, restless Welshman, Velvet Underground founder, producer, sonic terror and drone king has always been adept at bending instruments, genres – and at times screaming – to fit his artistic vision. Thankfully,'POPtical Illusion' is no exception.

Future-facing but grounded in experience, 'POPtical Illusion' possesses an adventurousness that first flowered on the nightmare clang of Cale's 1979's B-side 'Rosegarden Funeral Of Sores'. Somewhat brilliantly, 'Rosegarden' was rolled out with sadistic glee on recent tours, while those waiting for greatest hits wept.

This album's layered beats, drones, synths, organs and pianos build on the glories of 2023's long-player 'Mercy'. Like 'Mercy', this record draws on a huge cache of 80 songs that Cale recorded in under a year after a mental sea change during the pandemic. But where 'Mercy' boasted collaborations with artists including Weyes Blood and Animal Collective, here we find Cale exploring with long-time collaborator Nita Scott only.

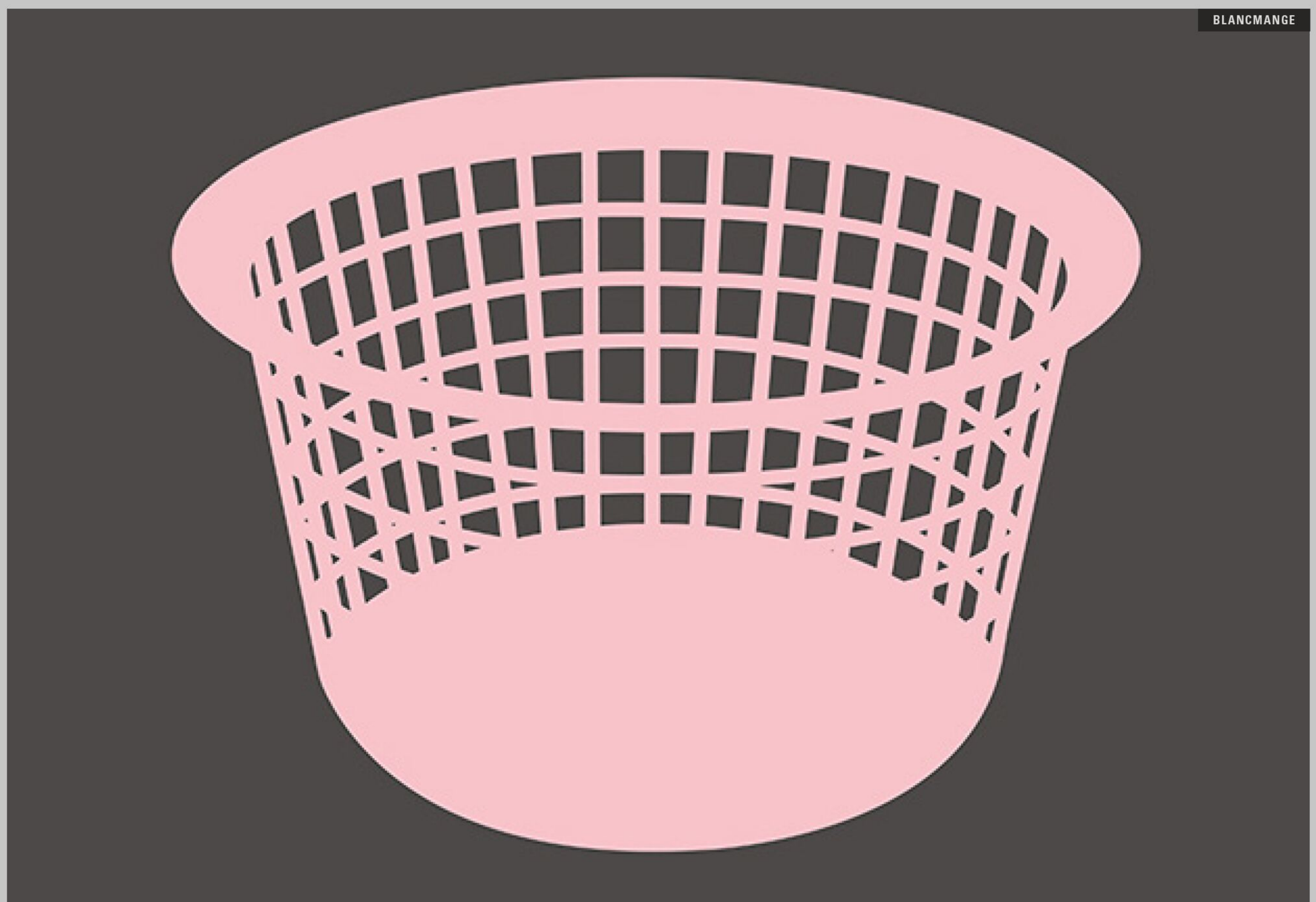
The 82 year-old Cale is still angry. His crumpled Welsh tones thrum with barely controlled rage at a world gone wrong, a world burdened with unfit custodians (particularly on 'Company Commander'). It's no helpless howl though – his vision is tempered with optimism ('Edge Of Reason'), tender reflections ('I'm Angry') and yes, even hope ('How We See The Light').

Elsewhere, there's plenty of clattery electropop. 'Davies And Wales' and 'All To The Good' both chug along with the showy propulsiveness of a neon-lit steam train, while 'Shark-Shark' possesses glorious swirling vocals and buzzing industrial flecks atop a beat that raids the same electronic playbox as 'Money' by The Flying Lizards.

And as for the standouts? They're too numerous to mention, but Cale's malevolent, sarcastic spoken word "It's soooo NICE to have you here / It feels so good" on 'All To The Good', and the crazy "End up in jail / End up in jail" wails on 'Shark-Shark' might be the vocal deliveries of the year. Even these moments are topped by the twisted bastard bossanova of 'Funkball The Brewster', where a polite tippity-tap hi-hat is led to places where no wide-eyed innocent bossa nova should go.

Given his unyielding desire to avoid repetition, it's an astonishing achievement for Cale to deliver a classic album six decades into his career. To deliver two of them in less than 18 months is nothing short of miraculous.

ANTHONY THORNTON



BLANCMANGE
Everything Is Connected
LONDON

"Up and down / I'm up the wall / I'm up the bloody tree." There's always been a whiff of the kitchen sink about Blancmange, with lyrics better suited to some gritty Alan Bleasdale 'Play For Today' than the balloons and silly string of 1980s 'Top Of The Pops'. But Neil Arthur and Stephen Luscombe were cracking pop stars regardless, and this splendid career-spanning collection makes a virtue of the dichotomy.

Early Blancmange burned briefly but brightly, and it's a gigantic leap from homespun 1981 instrumental 'Sad Day' to chart-straddling whoppers like 'Don't Tell Me'. The 2011 comeback album (and Luscombe's farewell) 'Blanc Burn' yielded the hilariously deadpan 'I'm Having A Coffee' ("There's something strange at the bottom of the fridge") and from there on it's been Arthur all the way, still effortlessly combining grime and sparkle. The new track 'Again, I Wait For The World' ties it all together perfectly – written in 1979 and finally recorded in 2024, it's both sweetly irresistible and defiantly thick-skinned. And that, surely, is the very essence of Blancmange. **BF**

THE GALAXY ELECTRIC & DROOG MULHOLLAND
Muzak From The Korova Milkbar
SUBEXOTIC

'Muzak From The Korova Milkbar' pairs The Galaxy Electric (Jacqueline Caruso and Augustus Green) with electronic music adventurer Drew "Droog" Mulholland. The jumping-off point for their partnership was a love of vintage sci-fi, but the end result found them behind the counter of the cafe favoured by the violence-loving droogs of Anthony Burgess' 'A Clockwork Orange', for a delicious, unpredictable sprawl of an album that covers a huge amount of ground.

In 'Red Ball', 'Mystery Song' and 'Make You Happy' you have breakbeat-heavy vocal trip hop throwbacks, occasionally slipping into chanson noir territory. Elsewhere, 'Narrow Passage', 'Scherzo' and 'Watching Walruses From Outer Space' exist as fractured soundscapes that veer fluidly between unexpected shapes and movements. Returning to the common ground that brought about this project, a piece like the curt, stompy 'Bog 33' is in reverential thrall to early BBC Radiophonic Workshop experimentation, all primitive bleeps and tape-spliced inventiveness. A wild, trippy expedition and a brilliant example of collaboration at its finest. **MS**

KATE CARR
Midsummer, London
PERSISTENCE OF SOUND

Experimental producer Kate Carr came up with the idea of a "sonic transect – a sound sampling along an axis" for a 2017 album made at various points on a Spanish mountain. On 'Midsummer, London' the concept returns as she explores the River Thames and its flow from west to east, on the longest day of the year – 21 June 2023. The album mixes extensive and rich field recordings with Carr's own subtle electronic embellishments, a consistently evocative and compelling pairing.

The titles are works of art in themselves, as 'Trying To Find The River At Slade Green; Did That Train Go To Dartford?' melts low-level synth hum into the distant chatter of train announcements and lapping water. 'The Bins Being Emptied Somewhere Near Twickenham' is as celestial and meditative as its source is prosaic, and 'Lunchtime For The Office Crowd, I Like The Sound Of Swan Rescue' captures some hilarious city worker chat about a lesser-known emergency service. As much about the journey as it is the destinations, 'Midsummer, London' is quite a ride. **BW**

CHURCH ANDREWS AND MATT DAVIES

CHURCH ANDREWS AND MATT DAVIES

Yucca

ODDA

On face value, the latest collaboration between producer Church Andrews (Kirk Barley) and drummer Matt Davies sounds like an electronic mishmash in the vein of Planet Mu and Rephlex. A closer listen reveals an intricacy and considered quality that belies its outwardly skittish delivery. For a start, these six pieces were informed by the Fibonacci sequence that's omnipresent in mathematics and nature, while Davies' percussion framework owes a debt to jazz and Senegalese/Indian drumming.

A nod to jazziness creeps into 'Roses', a laid-back, languid affair that stays steadfastly blissful in spite of calculated left turns toward dissonance and unpredictability. You hear the Fibonacci effect most prominently on 'Ferns', where the track seems to become progressively slower, almost reaching a dead stop before the sequence repeats itself. Elsewhere, 'Winston' and 'Chirp' contain sedate stabs and an inverted hardcore energy as they flip and flop between tempi. Clever, complex electronics for nerds and ravers alike. **MS**

CORKER CONBOY

In Light Of That Learnt Later

BAD INFO

Existing in a sonic space somewhere between Four Tet's 'Pause' and Tortoise's 'TNT', the debut album from London duo Corker Conboy slipped between the cracks when it was released in 2003. Luckily, that means this reissue hasn't been dulled by familiarity, nor has it dated during the years in-between – unlike the trip hop Adrian Corker and Paul Conboy produced as APE during the mid-90s.

The pair's pedigree as TV/film score composers is obvious in the threads of jazzy trumpet woven throughout 'From The Hip', but also in the way the layers of looped percussion, dubwise basslines and acoustic instruments work together to give tracks like 'Seedhead' a clear narrative thrust. Indeed, the dialogue between all the different elements within 'In Light Of That Learnt Later' is as tightly structured yet as natural-sounding as the best film scripts. This is the finest electronica-adjacent post-rock LP you didn't know you needed, and not simply because you probably didn't know it existed. **PC**

HIFI SEAN AND DAVID MCALMONT

Daylight

PLASTIQUE

Tired of hanging out the washing in your wellies? Fret not, here come Sean Dickson and David McAlmont with a record specifically designed to soundtrack the bone-thawing charms of the summertime. In a country where, at time of writing, it's been relentlessly pissing down since last September, they couldn't have arrived at a more apposite moment. "When I had your shadow / It was warm in the sun," sings McAlmont exultantly, amid the squelchy synths of 'Sun Come Up'. It's an irresistible stomper.

Sure, there's melancholy. 'Sad Banger' pays tribute to a legion of heartbreak-fuelled disco classics and 'Golden Hour' is a soulful salute to bittersweet holiday romance. But the clouds quickly disperse, and keen gardeners will applaud 'Summery' with its rare lyrical nod to the heady scent of the ceanothus flower. "You're the blue glow in the brightest sky," sings McAlmont, as Dickson summons a barmy army of sun-baked Balearic beats. Drizzly old winter suddenly feels like an impossibly distant memory. **BF**

ALAN VEGA
Insurrection
IN THE RED

Fiery unreleased recordings burn bright

Like Slim Pickens straddling the nuclear bomb to oblivion in 'Dr Strangelove', Alan Vega rode some of electronic music's heaviest bombardments over his five-decade recording career. Few are quite as cacophonously extreme, though, as this second exhumation from the enormous Vega Vault of unreleased recordings.

From 1995's 'Dujang Prang' onwards, Vega worked with engineer Perkin Barnes at his downtown NYC studio. Together with his long-time partner and collaborator Liz Lamere, Vega amassed hours of material. She handled beats and keyboards. He mangled street recordings, radio static and experimented with the studio's analogue arsenal.

Lamere called Vega the "Director of Sound" due to his uncanny instinct for manhandling unfamiliar machines until they emitted previously unheard noises, before improvising vocals from his notebooks. Seven albums were fashioned from these sessions until Vega's death in 2016 – the tip of a huge iceberg.

Co-produced by Lamere and appointed protege Jared Artaud of The Vacant Lots, 'Insurrection' follows 2022's "lost album" 'Mutator'. Here, the selection is cherry-picked from a period roughly around 1997/98, when Vega was on a furiously creative rollercoaster into America's encroaching heart of darkness.

That focus reached an apogee on the darkly personal album '2007', released in 1999. Gripped by post-Gulf War angst, he feared for the world and the crime-ridden New York their son Dante would be entering, with premonitions of 9/11 manifesting in stark sculptures he produced concurrently.

On 'Insurrection', the coruscating 'Fireballer Fever' is almost impenetrable in its intensity. Vega's freestyling vocals are anchored by brutal drum machine tattoos that help steer the album's unfettered circuit carnage into song-like form. Those who caught 2022's 'Murder One' / 'Invasion' 12-inch will find the former's chilling maelstrom and the latter's apocalyptic disco right at home among the self-describing titles here, including 'Sewer', 'Crash' and 'Genocide'.

The startlingly different single trailer 'Mercy' invokes his love of Albert Ayler-style free jazz through its shattered piano and treated string bass, as he emotionally addresses the suffering of innocents. This, and the closing track 'Fireballer Spirit', inject a note of customary optimism and hope.

Following 'Mutator', 'Insurrection' is the second example of a masterclass in handling a late artist's estate with sensitivity. Vega is still raising the bar for electronic music and liberated expression from beyond the grave. An astonishing feat.

KRIS NEEDS

Label Profile

Label: Quindi Records
Location: Florence, Italy
Est: 2020

Potted History: "After years spent behind the scenes as a consultant and artist for two Italian labels, Marmo Music and Bosconi, I decided to start a record label in 2019," says Quindi founder Niccolo Daniel Rufo. "This was at the urging of my dear friend Herva, who felt that I had the potential and talent to run my own. For the past 20 years, I have been a radio and club music DJ, cultivating a passion for multiple genres of music, from electronic to more organic, with a wide spectrum of sounds and styles. I have also always been a compulsive record collector.

"The choice of the name Quindi is due to the fact that it's memorable and has a pleasant sound, especially for those who are not Italian speakers – and it's slightly mocking for those who are! I do pretty much everything myself, using various collaborators for press, videos and graphics, but I try to fully involve my artists in the creative process of their album covers."

Mission Statement: "Quindi does not necessarily aim to innovate or take itself too seriously, but simply to come up with enjoyable albums that go straight to listeners' hearts," explains Rufo. "I like to choose artists that represent the various aspects of my musical background, or who I really feel are unique at the moment. It is with this in mind that I decided to develop Quindi in an uncategorisable way, with the intention of embodying the spirit of a truly indie label.

"Some friends say that Quindi is vaguely like Mute, Thrill Jockey or Kranky in its philosophy. I like to interpret each record as a movie script, a story to be told from beginning to end, following the narrative of a soundtrack. As a DJ, the habit of curating the flow of each album's tracklist remains a key aspect for me."

Key Artists & Releases: "I'm grateful for each artist's contribution to enriching the label's catalogue, from the organic ambient electronica of Woo and Cabaret Du Ciel to the sparse and electronically processed post-rock of Dead Bandit.

"We also have the warm, surfy Californian slowcore of Bondo, the bizarre, crisp jazzy songwriting weirdness of Monde UFO, the baroque art-pop of Fortunato Durutti Marinetti, the disruptive mutant funk energy of American Cream Band and the dreary twilight solitude of Ellis Swan, Jota Solo and Nový Svět. As an Italian label, far from being part of any clique, each release has been a success in itself."

Future Plans: "The next record will be a 10-inch vinyl by Swedish band Testbild! in the style of the so-called Canterbury sound and characterised by a certain Nordic, ambient delicateness. I am also impatiently waiting for the new ACB and FD Marinetti LPs to take shape."

Any Other Business? "Bringing up my daughter Milla the best I can, running my monthly 'Dreamlapse' show for the Italian internet radio station Fango, hopefully continuing to organise concerts in Florence, as I have been doing for the past two years, and helping Quindi artists to tour in Europe."

For more, visit quindirecords.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always

Martha Rose on the first and last albums she bought, plus an all-time favourite

FIRST

SPICE GIRLS

Spice

VIRGIN, 1996

"I wasn't really a big fan of contemporary pop music as a kid, but I knew I had to have this album. I loved the idea of 'girl power', and it looked like the Spice Girls were having a lot of fun. I thought that the lyrics of 'Wannabe' were, 'If you wanna be my lover / You gotta get rid of my friends', which I found deeply disturbing. I was glad to find out I was wrong."

LAST

DER ASSISTENT

Der Assistent

PAPERCUP, 2023

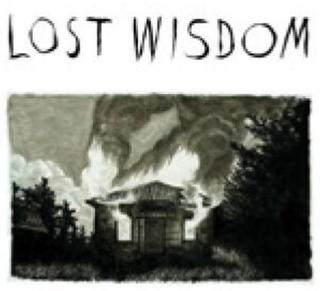
"A beautiful record by a fellow Berlin musician. His production is so elegant, charming and breezy. I caught him live, by chance, at a lakeside festival somewhere in southern Germany while I was playing with another friend's band and was immediately entranced. The record has a unique dub feeling as well as sounding like an 80s classic, with smooth and abstract German lyrics. It's on repeat, just like Sade."

ALWAYS

MOUNT EERIE WITH JULIE DOIRON & FRED SQUIRE

Lost Wisdom

PW ELVERUM & SUN, 2008



"This was extremely hard to choose. I'm going with a slightly curveball, melancholy one, because I always come back to it. It's extremely deep and raw, bursting with the things I love about folk music – heart-wrenching, yearning, nostalgia, homesickness and loss. Minimal, pure harmonies with sometimes even grungy instrumentation. There is a mysticism that I recognised in myself on hearing this record and never forgot. 'Secret knowledge comes to me in the dusk.'"

MARTHA ROSE

Close To Close

MILLIONS AND MANSIONS

Sweet, synth-driven sounds of summer

The first seeds of British multi-instrumentalist Martha Rose's third album 'Close To Close' were planted during lockdown, a time when many of us felt pangs of fragility and loneliness to an unprecedented extent.

Fast forward to May 2023, and Rose finally got the chance to bring those initial ideas to life. Working alongside producer ET at his studio in Berlin's Neukölln district, she created the album's warm, tender and wistful sound using Yamaha keyboards, organic live recordings, and vintage drum machine samples.

Consequently, 'Close To Close' is a record of two sides. One evoking the heart-wrenching loneliness brought about by having a lot of time to reflect on your life and to practise some radical self-honesty. The other centring on a dreamy, nostalgic sweetness that wraps itself around you like the warmth of a favourite blanket.

Take the opening track 'Gateway Drug', for instance, with its whimsical nursery rhyme melodies that twinkle and sigh as Rose's candid, self-deprecatory lyrics are left suspended in mid-air. "I'm like a gateway drug to love / Always one before the one / Never quite enough."

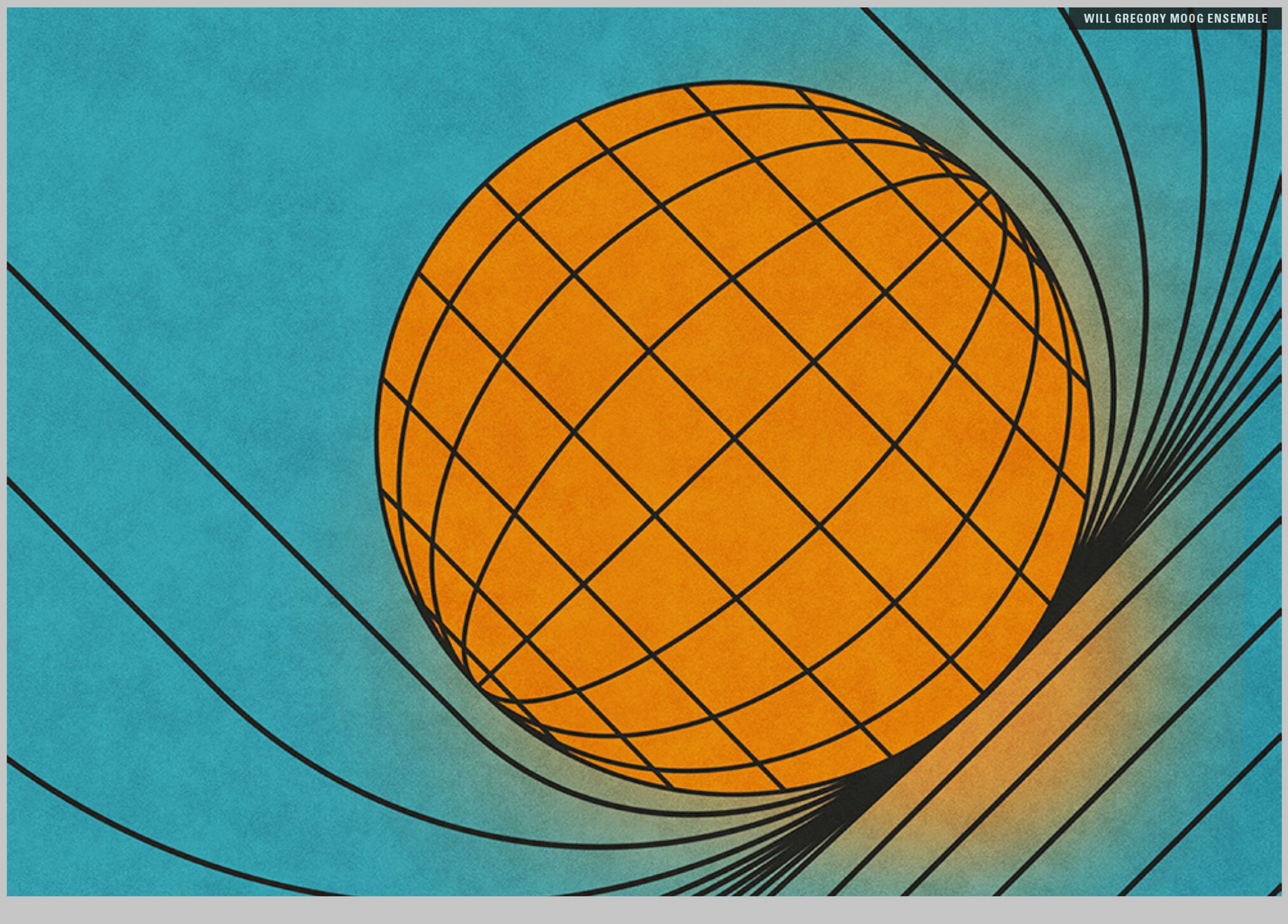
Four minutes in, and 'Close To Close' has you wrapped around its finger already. Rose's light, airy tones are mesmeric in their weightlessness, and her laconic honesty is just poetic enough to have you rooting for her as though she's a character in a novel.

In fact, the theme of unadorned honesty is prevalent all the way through the album, whether Rose is dabbling in wispy ballads ('September'), rhythm-driven synthpop ('Eurydice'), or chiming retro bangers ('Heart Still Beats 4 U'). "Sometimes nothing is sweeter / Than what remains unsaid," she says by way of introduction on the last of these. It's surely a line that could be used as the album's manifesto.

Rather than elucidating every little detail of the broken relationships and feelings of inadequacy that are the subject of numerous songs on 'Close To Close', Rose approaches such topics with a childlike simplicity, telling us the barefaced facts of the situation. "I try to keep it up without you / But nothing seems the right thing to do," she confesses on the folk-inspired 'Chin Up'.

The rest is left up to a swathe of lush synthesiser sounds, glittering production and the listener's limitless imagination.

IMOGEN BEBB



WILL GREGORY MOOG ENSEMBLE

Heat Ray

MUTE

Best-known as one half of electronic pop duo Goldfrapp, Will Gregory is something of a musical polymath. Having studied orchestral and chamber music, he's written operas and performed with everyone from Portishead to Tears For Fears. His latest record with the expansive Will Gregory Moog Ensemble uses a plethora of synths and other instruments to explore his fascination with the Greek mathematician Archimedes.

Working alongside the BBC National Orchestra Of Wales and other synth players, the composer constructs intricate patterns, passages and moods influenced by Archimedes' pivotal work. Gregory describes it as "an impression of his ideas in sound". That manifests in everything from the lavish strings, grandiose horns and brooding electronic bass of 'The Claw' to 'Young Archimedes', which has an optimistic classical air a little reminiscent of Wendy Carlos' pioneering synth music. These ingeniously interwoven pieces, using Moogs, Mellotrons and Korgs, are a fitting sonic tribute to a great mathematical mind. **BM**

CLUSTER

Zuckerzeit (50th Anniversary Edition)

BUREAU B

One of those mythologised albums that has been extensively chronicled, 'Zuckerzeit' boasts a great many admirers. Maverick free minds like Iggy Pop, Stereolab's Tim Gane or the Ghost Box label's creative figurehead and Focus Group man Julian House acknowledge it as a formative touchstone.

At this post-Berlin, third album stage of their career, Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius were essentially Harmonia without the official presence of Michael Rother. The former Neu! genius is credited as co-producer, though, contributing some of the album's revolutionary electronic equipment, including Farfisa organs and a primitive Elka analogue rhythm machine. Together they broke new ground.

Significantly, 'Zuckerzeit' (which roughly translates as 'Sugartime') was the first long-player created at their idyllic Saxony woodland commune, Forst. It's bucolic and delicately utopian where Roedelius' hand is at work – see the pastoral-cosmic beauty 'Marzipan' – but remains fiercely experimental and synthetic on Moebius' creations, like the metallic 'Rote Riki' or the programmed electropop pulses of 'Caramel'. Still essential half a century on? Too right. **CG**

SEX JUDAS FEAT RICKY

The Book Of Dreams / After Sex

SNICK SNACK MUSIC

A double concept album in which our protagonists Sex Judas and Ricky experience a monumental break-up and document all of its deceitful, dirty and distressing glory across two distinctly different sets. Part one, 'The Book Of Dreams', takes you through the multi-hued and delirious underbelly of disco hedonism. This Oslo outfit dive into post-punk meets electro-funk grooves, sliding between the sheets of Talking Heads and a host of Afrobeats and voices from Mali. 'Work For 7 Days' and 'It's In Your Eyes' offer a Bootsy-sized bonanza of 1980s funk, while 'High Maintenance' is Parliament's 'Flash Light' reimagined through the beats of Tony Allen.

With disassociated vocals smothered by disquieting ambience, the second album 'After Sex' finds discordant strings and soundscapes slipping in and out of focus. Across six songs of regret and self-loathing, it's all bathed in the woozy monochrome of morning-after half-light, as on the almost-R&B of 'Amour Fou'. Imagine Tom Waits' 'Swordfishtrombones' written by Prince. Deliciously uneasy listening. **MJ**

JIMI TENOR WITH COLD DIAMOND & MINK

Is There Love In Outer Space?

TIMMION

Jimi Tenor has been around for what feels like a lifetime, but a new album from the prolific Finnish future-jazz cosmonaut is always a treat. The follow-up to 2022's excellent 'Multiversum', 'Is There Love In Outer Space?' sees him cut loose in typically exuberant but considered fashion.

Recorded with Timmion Records' production team and studio band Cold Diamond & Mink, Tenor and co mostly operate at their own relaxed pace here. The languid drift of the title track is like one of those "galactic ballads that rare soul collectors spend their pensions on", while 'Gaia Sunset, Part 1' and 'Part 2' chug along with wah-wah guitar and a deliciously wonky space groove. The vibe is most definitely unhurried – 'Laputa' has the retro feel of Jean-Claude Vannier's classic arrangements for Serge Gainsbourg, and the fluttering 'Orbiting Tiesto' is a bare-bones Stereolab. But the best is saved for last as the uptempo, Sun Ra-esque 'What Are You Doing?' suddenly urges you to "get your ass on the dancefloor". Fast or slow, this is funkin' great. **VI**

CONNY FRISCHAUF

Kenne Keine Töne

BUREAU B

'Kenne Keine Töne' is one of the more interesting deconstructions of pop in recent times, an almost postmodern dissection of how to make an album. Conny Frischauf's second full-length switches with seamless grace from fine synthpop bangers redolent of Tom Tom Club – 'Schall Und Schwer (Erst Aus Dem Ufo Seh Ich Dich)' – to moments of experimentation and airless introspection. It's an album that explores the senses and Frischauf is never afraid to dismantle a sweet melody or groove, though 'Kenne Keine Töne' is rarely, if ever, dissonant.

Studio faders are either at full tilt or cut out completely, and the listener's mind becomes focused on anticipating the unexpected. 'Röte' brings bouncy synths into quirky communion with recorders, while 'Zwei Minuten' offers up two whole minutes of silence. Yes, it's been done before, but it's no less disconcerting when the moment arrives, especially for pop fans who are not ordinarily equipped to process quietude. The honking sax of the adjoining 'Adieu Araneus' will do little to relieve feelings of discombobulation, but it will make you want to explore this album again and again. **JA**

DREW MCDOWALL

A Thread, Silvered And Trembling

DAIS

'A Thread, Silvered And Trembling' finds Scottish experimentalist Drew McDowall trading in a plaintive style that's prevalent in Gaelic music, all filtered through his signature, brooding approach. The opener, 'Out Of Strength Comes Sweetness', initially presents an unwinding melody that approximates Eno's 'Music For Airports'. At the very point where tonal familiarity settles in, the track seems to extend outward into a brittle, subtly jarring landscape that taints and distorts the delicate melodic angles elsewhere.

The 14-minute 'And Lions Will Sing With Joy' amplifies those cacophonous fringes and lights the darkest corners with elliptical, almost gothic melodies that nod to McDowall's pivotal work with Coil. A quintessentially Scottish mournfulness appears on 'In Wound And Water', with an arrangement of turbulent, earthy drones offset by a cluster of tightly coiled harp melodies from Marilu Donovan. Her playing, and McDowall's intricate sound design will doubtless stay with you long after this wonderfully stirring album has ended. **MS**

JOHN GRANT

The Art Of The Lie

BELLA UNION

Religion takes a beating in funky style

For John Grant, honesty has proven to be the best policy. His albums, from 2013's 'Pale Green Ghosts' onwards, have become ever more autobiographical. The increasing musical depth of his synth-laden, blue-eyed soul matched by lyrics delving even deeper into his personal history.

For all that he once sarcastically claimed to be "The greatest motherfucker / That you're ever gonna meet", it was when he dropped the ironic posturing to open up about struggling to reconcile
his homosexuality with his strict religious upbringing on 2021's 'Boy From Michigan' that Grant sounded most confident.

The reckoning with his past continues on 'The Art Of The Lie'. Titles like 'Daddy', 'Mother And Son' and 'Father' are pretty big clues as to who Grant is addressing when he sings, "I feel ashamed because I couldn't be / The man you always hoped I would become".

But things are more ambiguous than they may initially seem. 'Daddy' could either be about Grant's own father or the heavenly one that played such an imposing role in his life. The way the chorus crashes in over martial drumming and synth crescendo conveys a certain sense of rapture.

Yet, if his feelings about God seem mixed, Grant's opinions about the Lord's self-appointed earthly representatives are crystal clear. 'All That School For Nothing' excoriates the heartlessness and hypocrisy of a particularly American strain of Christianity over frisky Prince-inspired funk, similar to that underpinning 'It's A Bitch'.

'Meek AF', which has the same squelchy swagger as Grant's work in Creep Show, is an equally unerring attack on religious hucksters. The lines "Jesus wants you rich" and "Art of the lie" give the album both its name and, in switching the title of Donald Trump's 'The Art Of The Deal', one of a number of allusions to the former president, who could well be the sinister figure beckoning you "inside his brightly coloured carriage" in 'The Child Catcher'.

Working with renowned producer Ivor Guest, the Vangelis synths and epic arrangements throughout are as seductive as any promise of wealth or eternal life. But whether it's Grant's simmering anger or traces of distorted guitar, there's always something to curdle the sweetness, giving 'The Art Of The Lie' the sharp taste of dreams in danger of turning sour.

PAUL CLARKE

KRM & KMRU

Disconnect

PHANTOM LIMB

Duo present mesmerising dub drones

On paper, this hook-up between ambient artist Joseph Kamaru (KMRU) and Kevin Richard Martin (KRM), best-known as industrial dub producer The Bug, is something of a surprise.

Kenyan musician KMRU first came to prominence in 2020 with his lush, field recording-laced works. Based in Berlin, he has released on such renowned labels as Editions Mego, Injazero, Warp and Ostgut Ton, with his music dedicated to delicate electronics, subtle melodic detail and calm reflection.

Now living in Brussels, Martin, who has recorded under monikers such as Techno Animal, Pressure, Ice and King Midas Sound, has often veered towards the loud, heavy and abrasive in his material, ranging from dubstep and dancehall to experimental jazz, post-rock and dub. Listen closer though, and there's evidently plenty of common ground between the two artists.

Martin first discovered Kamaru via the 2020 documentary 'Under The Bridge', and subsequently delved deeper into his music. KMRU, on the other hand, was already a fan of The Bug. On 'Disconnect', their mutual appreciation for atmosphere comes to prominence.

Martin's recent material, both solo and with other artists such as Fennesz, has ventured in an ambient direction, while KMRU has been consistently experimental and creative in his approach. Here, the latter's soft-spoken voice is threaded through the tracks, adding a soothing counterpoint to the sometimes towering stacks of electronics.

'Arkives' crackles and murmurs with dusty frequencies and what sounds like electric guitar drones. 'Differ' is even further out, like dub slowed to an entropic pulse. Submerged chords echo off into infinity, while a melodic vibraphone note possesses a pensive quality, doused into fuzz and hum.

Each of the six tracks feels like a variation on a deep dub theme, but other influences are discernible in the soundscape too. The Bug's sense of menace lurks like a spectre throughout, while KMRU's dedication to pushing hidden details to the fore adds to the deep hypnosis.

Also present is the ghostly aura of drone metal, a feature of Martin's music previously most evident in 'Concrete Desert', his collaboration with Earth. This is a mesmerising record whether you're already a fan of these artists or not. 'Disconnect' comes highly recommended.

BEN MURPHY

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BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

KRM (Kevin Richard Martin) and **KMRU** (Joseph Kamaru) answer this month's quick-fire questions

INTERVIEW: NEIL MASON

You're both described as "acclaimed heavyweights" by your people. There are worse titles to have, right? How would you describe yourselves?
KRM: "Uncompromising."
KMRU: "In context, I guess soft-spoken."

What was it about the other's work that first appealed?
KRM: "Joseph's work, philosophy and textural finesse impressed me from the get-go, ever since hearing the first album I found by him, which was 'Peel' on Editions Mego. Simultaneously having discovered an interview with Joseph for ADE's 'Under The Bridge' documentary, I felt his tone of voice and elliptical thought patterns were totally on point. He felt like a soul brother in terms of us both being obsessive deep-space cadets."
KMRU: "Personally, I'm a huge fan of Kevin's The Bug project. I think I knew about it before discovering KRM. Just the limens of sound in his work is inspiring."

Did you hear aspects of your own work in each other's?
KRM: "I felt 101 per cent that we shared the need to explore ambient textures as a monastic retreat and heightened deep listening experience. I also felt Joe has a sense of fragility, sensuality and grace in his work, which I'm actively exploring as Kevin Richard Martin. And I think we both share an interest in seeing how deep beauty can be reflected with sound."
KMRU: "I think there's a crossover in our work, mostly on the KRM project. Kevin has a sensitivity to sound and his dynamic gamut is evident on his different collaborations and as The Bug."

What are the ingredients for a good collaboration?
KRM: "Being able to flourish on the same wavelength and raise each other's game. The point at which X + Y can equal a hot and surprising Z."
KMRU: "Getting to know each other outside of work."

I'm assuming you worked on 'Disconnect' remotely? What are the pros and cons of that arrangement?
KRM: "The pros are no logistical sacrifices, and the ability to work together despite geographical or practical limits. The cons are probably that the back and forth can take time, whereas if you are in the same room, spontaneity reigns. To be honest, the end result is my obsession regardless of time or space, and I see no disadvantage of a remote collab, if the chemistry is blooming."
KMRU: "I think collaborating remotely is exciting as there's always a surprise when listening to what the other person has done. The feeling of not knowing is special. The cons are definitely not having the immediate reaction to what you are working on. I find when working in person I end up jamming a lot and creating new ideas, learning and sharing different processes with others which can be missed remotely."

Have you met in real life?
KRM: "We've met informally, and in the future will bring this project to another zone with live shows to see how the chemistry develops in performance mode."
KMRU: "Yes, we met in Berlin and I've seen Kevin live a couple of times too."

What was the starting point for this project? What was the spark?
KRM: "Having been consistently impressed by all the KMRU releases, I finally plucked up the courage to ask him if he would like to work together, but I threw in a curveball by suggesting it was vocals I primarily wanted him to provide. It advanced from there."
KMRU: "Kevin reached out with the idea of a collaboration with voice. It was timely as I was working on a text which voice would be part of."

Providing vocals is quite a departure for an artist who makes instrumental ambient music! Where did that idea come from?
KRM: "I honestly felt Joseph's tone, flow and content on the ADE documentary was very poetic and charming. In fact, his use of space in his speech patterns alone were totally dub style."

Joseph's voice sounds great. On 'Arkives', where it's combined with low rumbling bass, there are echoes of the great Lee "Scratch" Perry
KRM: "I hadn't made that connection, to be honest, but actually the comparison works in as much as Lee Perry's singing voice was frail and beautiful in general and added multiple layers of meaning and depth to his tracks. The same applies for Joseph."

The track titles – 'Differences', 'Difference' 'Differ' and 'Arkives', 'Ark', 'Arcs' – suggest they're connected in some way?
KRM: "They are variations on a theme, whether it be musical, melodic or philosophical, or in fact all of those. They are truly dub in terms of mindset, and sound exploration, thriving on mutation and evolutions of the original idea."

And yet the album is called 'Disconnect'!
KRM: "True. But contrast is valuable to shed new light. Though the title may appear contradictory, we both felt it fits in with the existential pull of the record."

Was it tempting to run each trio of tracks together as one long track?
KRM: "Honestly, no… it was more interesting to atomise them and to find new patterns for all the fragments. Basically, to keep turning the kaleidoscope."

Are there plans to work together again?
KRM: "Absolutely, the premiere is already booked, but contractually we are not allowed to divulge at this point. Safe to say, it's at one of our favourite European festivals this winter."
KMRU: "Definitely. We'll work on some new music together and also play live soon."

KRM & KMRU's 'Disconnect' is out now on Phantom Limb

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